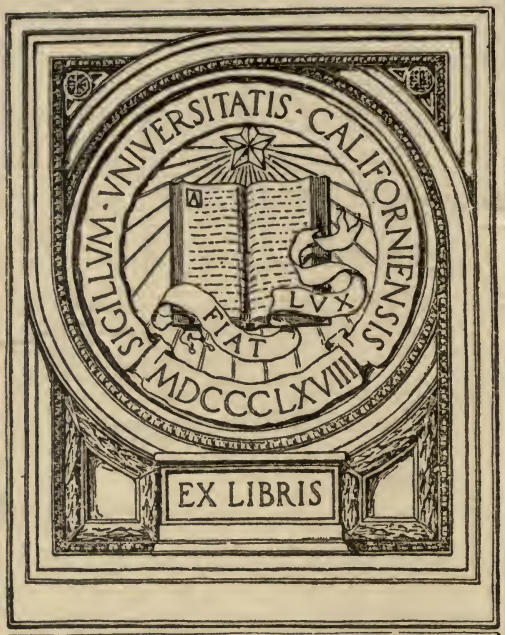
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POETRY AND PROSE

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BEING

Essays on Modern English Poetry

BY

ADOLPHUS ALFRED JACK

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TO

L. J.

'Non enim possumus omnia per nos agere.'

PREFACE

THIS little book is an attempt to make a little clearer what every one feels about poetry. It is an attempt pursued in a number of essays upon themes so familiar that in writing upon them I have the advantage of touching directly upon the actual poetical experience of almost every reader. There is the further personal advantage that in dealing with a body of poetry so often analysed, the liability to individual caprice is, at least in part, eliminated.

But there is one drawback. The familiarity of the subjects increases the difficulty, always present to the modern critical writer, of adequate acknowledgment. Where I am conscious of specific obligations to critical literature I have of course acknowledged them, but there remains a general indebtedness to all I have read. I should add in particular that I should probably not have ventured to write on Meredith's poetry at all but for the aid of Mr. Trevelyan's wonderfully clear Introduction; that I have also found *George Meredith*, by M. Sturge Henderson, with the poetical

chapters by Mr. Basil de Sélincourt, very helpful; and that though I had thought for many years about Wordsworth's poetry, Professor Raleigh's Study caused me to reconsider my method of approach. The writings that of recent years have done most to control my critical attitude are those which Mr. Bradley has collected in his *Oxford Lectures on Poetry*.

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POETRY: A NOTE

To distinguish Poetry from Prose it is not sufficient to say that the one is rhythmical expression, the other expression without rhythm. One knows quite well that it is not. Turn a leader from a daily newspaper into octosyllabics and it is still prose; we can recognise passages in Homer as poetry even when we have to read them in the beautiful prose of Mr. Lang.

Prose and Poetry are the forms man's expression takes according to his state of mind at the moment of utterance. Prose is the normal language of man; Poetry is his normal language, too, when he is in an abnormal state. Prose and Poetry, equally normally and naturally, give expression to two different sides of man's being.

A beast cannot speak in prose; that is left to mortal man. It is, however, the immortal in him that speaks in poetry. In poetry he voices the soul and is a part of the spirit that breathes in everything.

Prose is the language of cool reason, Poetry that of ecstasy. It follows that Prose is the language of speech, normal, without rhythm, balanced, like a high-way road, a straight line, a stick, the sentences coming to an end and joining into one another imperceptibly; and that Poetry is the language of song, at least of rhythm—for utterance, when excited, takes to itself a

rhythmic quality.[1] Poetry is what man utters when he loses his balance, his normality—the high and low notes of emotion.

Prose is an expression of the intellect; Poetry the language of feeling. Prose addresses itself to an audience; Poetry utters what she feels 'without thought of a listener.' If Prose is humanity talking, Poetry is humanity '*over*heard.'[2]

The best prose conveys to us what is already in the

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[1] As, for example, 'Generation after generation takes to itself the Form of a Body; and forth-issuing from Cimmerian Night, on Heaven's Mission APPEARS. What Force and Fire is in each he expends: one grinding in the mill of Industry; one hunter-like climbing the giddy Alpine heights of Science; one madly dashed in pieces on the rocks of Strife, in war with his fellow:—and then the Heaven-sent is recalled; his earthly Vesture falls away, and soon even to Sense becomes a vanished Shadow. Thus, like some wild-flaming, wild-thundering train of Heaven's Artillery, does this mysterious MANKIND thunder and flame, in long-drawn, quick-succeeding grandeur, through the unknown Deep. Thus, like a God-created, fire-breathing Spirit-host, we emerge from the Inane; haste stormfully across the astonished Earth; then plunge again into the Inane. Earth's mountains are levelled, and her seas filled up, in our passage: can the Earth, which is but dead and a vision, resist Spirits which have reality and are alive?'—*Sartor Resartus* (1838), p. 276.

[2] See Mill's *Thoughts on Poetry and its Varieties* (*Dissertations and Discussions*, vol. i.). The statement that poetry is '*over*heard' is Mill's, and what is here said of Prose he had formerly said of Eloquence. But as he is distinguishing not between Poetry and Prose but between Poetry and Eloquence, to avoid confusion I do not quote him here. His actual words will be found on page 137.

The process of Mill's essay is as follows: Denying as of course that the essence of poetry is to be found in metre, he goes on to distinguish shortly between poetry and matter of fact or science (terms he prefers to prose), 'the object of poetry' being 'confessedly to act upon the emotions.' But this also is the object of the novelist and orator. He therefore goes on to distinguish between the poet and the novelist, and enters at length upon the distinction between eloquence and poetry—a distinction most beautifully carried out by

brain of the writer. The best poetry reveals something to the poet himself.[1] Looking at his verses he does not know how that expression came there, or why Othello in his trouble, when the fancied conduct of Desdemona had ruined his world for him, said that it had been better had the Heavens

'Given to captivity me and my utmost hopes.'

Every man is a poet in his youth, a politician or an essayist in middle age. Prose lives in an atmosphere of completion; Poetry dallies with the beginnings and ends of things. She is all for the morning and the twilight, hope and sorrow, desire and defeat, what is to be and what has been.

Prose is *Is*, the ever-present fact, to-day; Poetry, in love with yesterday and to-morrow, flies to the cool night and away from noon—to the cool night with its silences and the riddle of the unnumbered stars. Prose deals with things as they are—school, marriage, wills, dress, law, civilisation, order and degree. Poetry is occupied with the bases of these—birth, love and death, human passions, men.

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reference to music and painting. This constitutes the first part, thirteen pages, from which no one would wish to dissent. The second part of the essay is chiefly occupied with the discussion of the essence of poetic natures, and of the difference 'between the poetry of a poet, and the poetry of a cultivated but not naturally poetic mind.' The distinction is clearly drawn, but for the purposes of a detailed discussion too generally and definitely, nor do I think his instances happy. For his distinction between description and descriptive poetry see page 20. This also occurs in the first part, a series of now generally accepted truths of which Mill has the credit, as far as I know, of being the first systematic enunciator.

[1] Cp. Mr. A. C. Bradley, *Oxford Lectures on Poetry*. 'The specific way of imagination is not to clothe in imagery consciously held ideas; it is to produce half-consciously a matter from which, when produced, the reader may, if he chooses, extract ideas.'

Is this enough to say about Poetry? The danger is that it is too much to say of Poetry as a whole, and that not all of it will apply to all the different kinds of Poetry; but I have set it down as it is, because I believe that most of it does apply. However, it is not possible to speak much more definitely of Poetry unless one has in view some definite variety. All the chief sayings about Poetry have been couched in very general terms. There is, for example, Bacon's profound saying: Poetry 'was ever thought to have some participation of divineness, because it doth raise and erect the mind, by submitting the shews of things to the desires of the mind; whereas reason doth buckle and bow the mind unto the nature of things.'[1] This is perhaps made a little clearer in Hazlitt's para-

[1] 'The use of this Feigned History hath been to give some shadow of satisfaction to the mind of man in those points wherein the nature of things doth deny it; the world being in proportion inferior to the soul; by reason whereof there is agreeable to the spirit of man a more ample greatness, a more exact goodness, and a more absolute variety, than can be found in the nature of things. Therefore, because the acts or events of true history have not that magnitude which satisfieth the mind of man, poesy feigneth acts and events greater and more heroical; because true history propoundeth the successes and issues of actions not so agreeable to the merits of virtue and vice, therefore poesy feigns them more just in retribution, and more according to revealed providence; because true history representeth actions and events more ordinary and less interchanged, therefore poesy endueth them with more rareness, and more unexpected and alternative variations. So as it appeareth that poesy serveth and conferreth to magnanimity, morality, and to delectation. And therefore it was ever thought to have some participation of divineness, because it doth raise and erect the mind, by submitting the shews of things to the desires of the mind; whereas reason doth buckle and bow the mind unto the nature of things.'—Bacon, 'Advancement of Learning, the Second Book.' *Works of Francis Bacon*, Spedding, vol. iii. p. 343.

phrase: 'Poetry, according to Lord Bacon, has something divine in it, because it raises the mind and hurries it into sublimity, by conforming the shows of things to the desires of the soul, instead of subjecting the soul to external things, as reason and history do.' And Emerson with his usual succinctness puts it shortly: 'The sensual man conforms thoughts to things; the poet conforms things to his thoughts'; or, to use the language employed in this essay, 'Poetry subjects external things to the soul, instead of subjecting the soul, as Prose does, to external things. In a word, the use of the poetical imagination communicates an ideal pleasure, a pleasure derived ultimately from the realisation by the soul of its own freedom in regard to the world.

This, if the greatest, is also a general doctrine of Poetry—the doctrine, if we may call it so, of the transcendence of the infinite. Equally general is Whitman's doctrine of a pervading infinity. 'The land and sea, the animals, fishes, and birds, the sky of heaven and the orbs, the forests, mountains, and rivers, are not small themes; but folks expect of the poet to indicate more than the beauty and dignity which always attach to dumb real objects,—they expect him to indicate the path between reality and their souls. Men and women perceive the beauty well enough—probably as well as he. . . . Outdoor people can never be assisted by poets to perceive: some may, but they never can. The poetic quality is not marshalled in rhyme or uniformity, or abstract addresses to things, nor in melancholy complaints or good precepts, but is the life of these and much else, and is in the soul.' What Whitman says here is not that the soul, by virtue of

its own infinity, transcends experience, but that in all experience it recognises an infinity akin to its own; and this too is one of the most profound things that has been said about poetry.

Yet all these definitions are general definitions, and it will be seen that, like all general definitions of poetry, they concern the essence, as also that, like all general definitions, they go some way to justify Poe's famous generalisation about long poems: a long poem, to express his theory in sensible terms, not being a long poem at all, but merely a collection of short poems with something intervening, something that is generally not poetry, but also generally not pure prose; something of a middle nature which at once preserves and modulates the effect of the more intense passages.[1]

Yet restricting ourselves to poetry that is essentially and obviously poetry, poetry that could be recognised as such immediately by every one—restricting ourselves, that is, to poetical passages, it is obvious that these may differ very widely in their nature, and that there are in fact several kinds of poetry. There is, in the

[1] On this head Mr. Bradley says: 'Naturally, in any poem not quite short, there must be many variations and grades of poetic intensity; but to represent the differences of these numerous grades as a simple antithesis between pure poetry and mere prose is like saying that, because the eyes are the most expressive part of the face, the rest of the face expresses nothing. To hold, again, that this variation of intensity is a defect is like holding that a face would be more beautiful if it were all eyes, a picture better if the illumination were equally intense all over it, a symphony better if it consisted of one movement, and if that were all crisis. And to speak as if a small poem could do all that a long one does, and do it much more completely, is to speak as though a humming-bird could have the same kind of beauty as an eagle, the rainbow in a fountain produce the same effect as the rainbow in the sky, or a moorland stream thunder like Niagara. A long poem, as we have

first place, the poetry of maturity, and opposed to it, or at least alien from it, there is young man's poetry.

Of the poetry of maturity most of what has been said above will be found to be true; and by the poetry of maturity I mean quintessential poetry, such poetry as is to be found especially in the greatest of Wordsworth's short poems, and constantly in Shakespeare's later work.

To distinguish such poetry from prose would be easy. One might say that while prose explains things from the outside, this poetry of maturity is concerned immediately with the feeling itself and is occupied solely in expressing the feeling as felt. There is a directness, an immediacy of connection between the felt emotion and the expression of that emotion—a connection as close as that between a blow inflicted on the chest and the answering sound of the blow. Some experience comes to the poet and he reverberates with a sympathetic cry. He brings you near to life, not by criticising life but by replying to life. Without explanation or apology, allowing no time for reflection, such poetry places the quivering heart of man on the

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seen, requires imaginative powers superfluous in a short one; and it would be easy to show that it admits of strictly poetic effects of the highest value which the mere brevity of a short one excludes.' This is to say, that of a long poem such as Wordsworth's *Prelude*, for example, Bacon's remark quoted above would be true in a wider sense than it could be true of a short poem. Nevertheless there are hosts of passages in the *Prelude* to which Bacon's remark could not be applied. It is better, therefore, for the purposes of clarity not to include long poems in our survey; not to include them, and yet not altogether to *exclude* them; this note serving sufficiently, for the present, to connect them with the discussion.

table. So that in those sudden bursts of volcanic speech you really get behind language altogether. You have expressed what has never been expressed, what could never have been expressed except by poetry. You seem to see the pulse of the machine.

The most concrete instance of the method of this kind of poetry is the short poem Wordsworth wrote on the death of Lucy. These Lucy poems, it is thought, are the record of a real experience, and it is supposed that Wordsworth in youth entertained the idea of ultimately marrying a cottage girl who had been brought up among the influences of Nature, and whose simplicity and gaiety of life had charmed his fancy. In good time she was to be educated so as to fit her for a place in the poet's social world, and in good time she was to be old enough to be his wife. But while the poet was dreaming of the future, the present slipped into the past, and the bright child was no more. The news dumfounded him. He had not connected with this young girl, the type of unfolding life, breathing gently and as by natural law, the sombre idea of death. He should have done so, since death comes to all and often unexpectedly, but he had not done so. She seemed as all young girls seem, and even especially for a young girl, the antithesis of death. But now she is dead, and Wordsworth, in his first realisation of the fact, can realise nothing more. He does not ask, as Shelley asks, of the nature of death. The sole thing he realises, as it is the sole thing we all realise when we first hear of the death of a beloved, is that she is no longer alive. Even of her life past he ceases to think in that stunned moment; her activity has become inactivity, and in the stupid brain of the

bereaved the one sentence chases itself eternally—she is dead :—

'A slumber did my spirit seal;
I had no human fears:
She seemed a thing that could not feel
The touch of earthly years.

No motion has she now, no force;
She neither hears nor sees;
Rolled round in earth's diurnal course,
With rocks, and stones, and trees.'

In those few lines two feelings are expressed perfectly, the feeling of vitality and the feeling of the inanimate, and those two feelings alone are expressed. The mind has not reflected upon its feeling, indeed, it has not moved. We are brought immediately in contact with the actual sensation. It is as if a man were to say, 'I am cold.'

This closeness of the expression to the predominant sensation of the heart is well instanced by a hundred surprising bursts in Shakespeare, lightning glimpses of the sources of emotion, laying bare, as by a flash, the workings within.

Sometimes it is done by a mere 'repartee':—

'So young, my lord, and true,'

and sometimes by a sufficing answer, as where in *Cymbeline* Imogen in tender rebuke says to her husband':—

'Why did you throw your wedded lady from you?
Think that you are upon a rock; and now
Throw me again.'

And Posthumus answers:—

'Hang there like fruit, my soul,
Till the tree die!'[1]

[1] These two instances are Tennyson's. I have slightly condensed his language.—*Life*, vol ii. p. 290.

So close indeed is this to the emotion that to read it is like seeing a gesture. It is merely the translation into words of an eternal embrace.

In such ways, then, and very commonly, Shakespeare makes his surprising effects, but almost equally commonly he startles us by his feelings aloud, getting the thing expressed while it is still inchoate, the expression also sharing an inchoate character. Thus when Macbeth hears of his wife's death there is his startled comment—

'She should have died hereafter,'—

an expression that has very much troubled literal critics in search for a precise meaning. The truth is, there is no precise meaning. The mind of man in its agony has become articulate. Indeed this is too much to say, for so near is the language to the feeling that it is hardly articulate language. It seems to occupy a middle place between the emotion and these statements or conclusions which we usually employ to express it. A reluctancy to accept the finality of doom, there is nothing more:—merely the movements of the human spirit, the deep, shadowy movements, caught and expressed.

Sometimes Shakespeare brings us into contact with the actual emotion by expressing, very fully, intangible emotions. There is the famous instance of Othello's reunion, after the perils of the voyage, with Desdemona at Cyprus:—

'If it were now to die,
'Twere now to be most happy; for, I fear,
My soul hath her content so absolute,
That not another comfort like to this
Succeeds in unknown fate.'

We are all familiar with those sudden visitations of apprehension in moments of great happiness, but at such moments such apprehensions are never fully voiced. We are not sufficiently near to our own emotions fully to voice them—to follow, so to speak, along their track. We are conscious of a vague movement of apprehension within, but we cannot feel it distinguishably enough to translate it. All we say is 'I am frightened.'

Sometimes so closely does Shakespeare follow a course of thought that he startles you by continuing to express it when, by all the rules of morality, the hero ought to be saying something else. Othello has committed what he considers the judicial murder of Desdemona. Her vices and his virtue, in his estimation, alike called for this. Yet so great is her love for him that, with her dying breath, she absolves him and takes her death upon herself. This, with an ordinary playwright, would remove the scales from Othello's eyes. With Shakespeare nothing of the kind happens. Othello is aware that her words, heard by Emilia, have exculpated him, and he refers to them to establish his freedom from the law. Then with magnificent magnanimity, once his innocence is legally established, he avows, with a superhuman pride, that the fatal, if necessary, act was his. But the expressions he uses in his avowal have naturally puzzled many. He speaks of Desdemona as if her noble lie were only the crown of a life of deception. The psychology, in short, is so literal, so instinctively profound, that we do not at first realise its truth. But certain it is that it is accurate; that Shakespeare, when he was writing this passage, was no longer Shakespeare but Othello himself, so

intimately and instinctively does he follow his feeling.[1] A man, once he has convinced himself of the essential badness of another, not only believes that there must be a bad motive for everything he does, but can see nothing in the act but the vice. A man I hate steals a loaf to succour a starving child; I am the loudest in crying 'Thief!' Of such consequence is the set of the mind. When Othello says

'She's, like a liar, gone to burning hell,'

I know I am not reading a play but, on the contrary, the book of life.

This is a book, however, which is familiar only to the mature poet, and glimpses of this kind into it are seldom afforded by young poets, and never by poets who are characteristically young. On the contrary, while the characteristic of this kind of mature poetry is its concentration, or rather its essentialness, for it comes straight from the immediate sensation without any aid from reflection, the characteristic of young man's poetry is its diffuseness.

The difference between these two kinds of poetry is indeed great. If one is the poetry that is of the sea itself, and its sound like that of a full wave coming up

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[1] Here is the passage :—

'EMIL. O, who hath done this deed?
DES. Nobody; I myself; Farewell:
Commend me to my kind lord; O, farewell! [*Dies.*
OTH. Why, how should she be murder'd?
EMIL. Alas! who knows?
OTH. You heard her say herself, it was not I.
EMIL. She said so; I must needs report the truth.
OTH. She's, like a liar, gone to burning hell;
'Twas I that kill'd her.'

with force on a rock, the other is the poetry that deals with the ripples, the many movements made by the body beneath. Both those kinds of poetry, of course, are emotional, but the feeling displays itself differently. In the one case all is in obedience to the deeply felt emotion, in the other the expression is less immediately controlled by it, plays round it, as it were; nor is the emotion itself in any degree as deep. The young poet feels, but he expatiates on his feeling; he doesn't express it directly. Young man's poetry is the rhapsody of appreciation. The young poet is more alive than other young men, though all young men are more alive than mature men, to the beauty and charm of colour, glory of sight, delight of scent which is in the world; as also he is more alive to the delicious ecstasies of newly awakened feeling. The agility of his own mind is a never-failing joy to the young poet. The exercise of 'all intelligences fair,' the surprising and often intricate beauties of romantic situations—these are his delights. He has the power, and he enjoys using the power, of drawing out from situations, even from phrases (La Belle Dame Sans Merci), all their store of beauty and wonder. The young poet loves to linger, where he finds a poetical situation to develop it to its utmost, even to tease it. He has long-drawn-out reveries upon the details of any interesting emotion. A man loses his father. Yes, him in whose likeness he was made, from whom he learnt his first lessons, who first told him that all things were won by application, who in his day fought many battles, whose cellars contained some flasks of the true Falernian, whose dog used to accompany him in all his walks up the mountain-side, whose failing steps the young poet himself guided,

whose hair never grew entirely white, and who now rests where the long grass waves—'The green, green grass of Traquair Kirkyard.' The young poet expatiates; suggest a theme and he will descant on it continuously. A mature poet tells you an old man dies 'and sleeps forgotten in his quiet grave.'

The most evident instances of young man's poetry are to be found in Keats, and in the early dramatic poems of Shakespeare. Such a play as *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* is full of them. Two old men cannot speak of a boy's going a-voyaging without a poetical excursion on travel :—

'ANTONIO. Tell me, Panthino, what sad talk was that,
Wherewith my brother held you in the cloister?
PANTHINO. 'Twas of his nephew Proteus, your son.
ANTONIO. Why, what of him?
PANTHINO. He wonder'd that your lordship
Would suffer him to spend his youth at home;
While other men, of slender reputation,
Put forth their sons to seek preferment out:
Some, to the wars, to try their fortune there;
Some, to discover islands far away;
Some, to the studious universities.'

And no sooner have they determined that Proteus is to journey too, than Proteus delays to sing :—

'Thus have I shunn'd the fire, for fear of burning;
And drench'd me in the sea, where I am drown'd:
I fear'd to shew my father Julia's letter,
Lest he should take exceptions to my love;
And with the vantage of mine own excuse
Hath he excepted most against my love.
O, how this spring of love resembleth
The uncertain glory of an April day;
Which now shews all the beauty of the sun,
And by and by a cloud takes all away!'

When Lucetta speaks words of moderation to Julia, Julia has this pretty run over :—

'LUCETTA. I do not seek to quench your love's hot fire ;
But qualify the fire's extreme rage,
Lest it should burn above the bounds of reason.
JULIA. The more thou dam'st it up, the more it burns ;
The current, that with gentle murmur glides,
Thou know'st, being stopp'd, impatiently doth rage ;
But, when his fair course is not hindered,
He makes sweet music with th' enamel'd stones,
Giving a gentle kiss to every sedge
He overtaketh in his pilgrimage ;
And so by many winding nooks he strays,
With willing sport to the wild ocean.'

Again Proteus, the methodical traitor, gives advice to the foolish Thurio how to win Silvia. He begins methodically enough :—

'But you, Sir Thurio, are not sharp enough ;
You must lay lime, to tangle her desires
By wailful sonnets, whose composed rhymes,
Should be full fraught with serviceable vows. . . .
Say, that upon the altar of her beauty
You sacrifice your tears, your sighs, your heart :
Write till your ink be dry ; and with your tears
Moist it again ; and frame some feeling line,
That may discover such integrity :—
For Orpheus' lute was strung with poet's sinews ;
Whose golden touch could soften steel and stones,
Make tigers tame, and huge leviathans
Forsake unsounded deeps to dance on sands.'

Surely here the poet is writing a very different kind of poetry from that of the mature poet. This is not feeling straight from the heart, but rather feeling played with, felt over, as some delicious morsel is felt over by the tongue. Nor is this enough to say. The vision of the leviathans has carried the imagination altogether away from the original subject of emotion, carried it away to fairy shores. All through this play what

Shakespeare is doing is poetising, expatiating on hints, opportunities, developing the melody.

Of the same kind is the poetry of *Richard II.* : it is all sung to a complaining lute. Sometimes too in his later plays Shakespeare has returns of this youthful habit, as when the Queen in *Hamlet*, announcing Ophelia's death, sings her song of willow :—

> 'There is a willow grows aslant a brook,
> That shows his hoar leaves in the glassy stream.'

What could be more of a gratuitous excursion than this, more unnatural, more undramatic ; but also, if we are to use the word with any breadth of meaning at all, more poetical ?

Sometimes in his maturity, even when he is most serious, Shakespeare allows his fancy to linger on an idea ; it is solemn play, but it is play, as in the famous—

> 'Never, Iago. Like to the Pontic Sea,
> Whose icy current and compulsive course
> Ne'er keeps retiring ebb, but keeps due on
> To the Propontic, and the Hellespont ;
> Even so my bloody thoughts.'

Indeed we may say that of all poets Shakespeare, on account of his expansive imagination, is most prone, even in maturity, to illustration. But here the whole passage, though by no means a direct expression of emotion, may be said to be in obedience to the deeply felt emotion behind.[1] Such passages remind us that

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[1] Similarly the sudden outburst of the expansive Biron at the close of *Love's Labour's Lost* is an instance of quintessential poetry obtruding amidst young man's work.

> 'To move wild laughter in the throat of death ?
> It cannot be ; it is impossible.
> Mirth cannot move a soul in agony.'

between young man's poetry and the poetry of maturity, broad as the distinction is, there can be no absolute dividing line.

Nevertheless the distinction is of service and helps us to clear our ideas. To see things clearly it is necessary to distinguish.

What is to be said of meditative poetry? There are passages in the poets that are strictly meditative, passages sometimes that are merely descriptive, which yet affect us as essentially poetical. Meditation is an intellectual process, and description is the product of observation. It is as possible to meditate without any emotion at all, as it is possible to describe. Yes, but the meditation does not affect us as essentially poetical till the meditation has awakened feeling.

There is a sonnet of Wordsworth's which is purely meditative, even discriminatively meditative :—

> 'Most sweet it is with unuplifted eyes
> To pace the ground, if path be there or none,
> While a fair region round the traveller lies
> Which he forbears again to look upon;
> Pleased rather with some soft ideal scene,
> The work of Fancy, or some happy tone
> Of meditation, slipping in between
> The beauty coming and the beauty gone.'

The overwhelming though tender grace of the last line comes from a poet who is overmastered by his emotion.

If we turn to descriptive passages we shall find that there the ultimate merit—that is, the ultimate poetical truth, is equally dependent on emotion.

Mr. George Trevelyan in his Essay on Meredith compares two passages about the nightingale—one from

Meredith's *Night of Frost in May*, with one from *Prometheus Unbound.*

Meredith's passage runs as follows :—

'In this shrill hush of quietude,
The ear conceived a severing cry.
Almost it let the sound elude,
When chuckles three, a warble sly,
From hazels of the garden came,
Near by the crimson-windowed farm.
They laid the trance on breath and frame,
A prelude of the passion-charm.
Then soon was heard, not sooner heard
Than answered, doubled, trebled, more,
Voice of an Eden in the bird
Renewing with his pipe of four
The sob : a troubled Eden, rich
In throb of heart : unnumbered throats
Flung upward at a fountain's pitch,
The fervour of the four long notes,
That on the fountain's pool subside,
Exult and ruffle and upspring :
Endless the crossing multiplied
Of silver and of golden string.
There chimed a bubbled underbrew
With witch-wild spray of vocal dew.'

That is very particular. Shelley is much less so :—

'There the voluptuous nightingales
Are awake through all the broad noonday.
When one with bliss or sadness fails,
And through the windless ivy-boughs,
Sick with sweet love, droops dying away
On its mate's music-panting bosom ;
Another, from the swinging blossom
Watching to catch the languid close
Of the last strain, then lifts on high
The wings of the weak melody,—
Till some new strain of feeling bear
The song, and all the woods are mute.'

'I do not wish to dispute,' says Mr. Trevelyan, 'which

is the finer passage of the two, but I know which is most like the nightingale.'[1]

But this is the Meredith enthusiast. In fact, Shelley's passage is more like ; not sharing the confusing power of Meredith's over-definiteness, it is more nightingaley.

Poetry is not description, it is sympathetic emotion.[2] One does not want a line drawing of the nightingale's

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[1] The choice of passages is Mr. Trevelyan's. Had he been anxious to bring out my point and not his own he would have chosen a passage about the nightingale from the poet of the nightingale :—

> 'Now more than ever seems it rich to die,
> To cease upon the midnight with no pain,
> While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad
> In such an ecstasy !'

[2] Cp. Tolstoy's definition of Art. 'Art is a human activity, consisting in this, that one man consciously, by means of certain external signs, hands on to others feelings he has lived through, and that other people are infected by these feelings, and also experience them.'—Tolstoy's *What is Art?* Mr. Aylmer Maude's translation.

By 'consciously' Tolstoy means that a scream of agony, however heartrending, is not Art, there must be an Art purpose ; and by 'hands on to others' he means that the mere *expression* of emotion is not Art, since emotion may be expressed so badly as not to excite a contagious emotion. Thus a wretched bombastic tragedy may excite us to laughter, not tears.

Tolstoy is not discussing the standpoint of these Essays, that the highest Art is largely unconscious. He does not deny, he explicitly states that in the deepest poetry or art the poet is chiefly thinking not of affecting others, but of expressing himself. Tolstoy's purpose, however, is not to distinguish between spontaneous and oratorical art. He is speaking of all Art, and trying to define the human activity broadly understood.

No doubt there must be a contact between the emotion of the artist and that of the audience. This is necessary to Art, and since it is so the artist may be said, however subconsciously, always in some degree to intend it. The mere act of publication proves this. Yet there are very important distinctions in the degree of intention, and these Tolstoy does not discuss.

song; what one wants, and what the poet alone can give, is the effect produced by it:—

'And this is the soul's heaven, to have felt.'[1]

'Description,' says Mill, 'is not poetry because there is descriptive poetry. But an object which admits of being described may also furnish an occasion for the generation of poetry, which we thereupon choose to call descriptive. The poetry is not in the object itself, but in the state of mind in which it may be contemplated.'[2]

Of those descriptions of Milton's that come home to us we can say the same:—

'Anon they move
In perfect phalanx to the Dorian mood
Of flutes and soft recorders; such as rais'd
To height of noblest temper heroes old
Arming to battle; and instead of rage
Deliberate valour breath'd, firm and unmov'd
With dread of death to flight or foul retreat;
Nor wanting power to mitigate and 'suage
With solemn touches troubled thoughts, and chase
Anguish, and doubt, and fear, and sorrow, and pain,
From mortal or immortal minds.'[3]

As Milton thinks of the troubles music softens, he thinks of all the troubles of man—

'Anguish, and doubt, and fear, and sorrow, and pain,'—

and, so thinking, his heart is bowed beneath the sense of mortal calamity, bowed and shaken and filled by it as is his noble line. His host moves humanly before us;

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[1] Sonnet, *Winter Heavens*, Meredith.

[2] Mill, *Thoughts on Poetry and its Varieties*. In the original passage there are also references to didactic poetry, but as tending both to confusion and controversy I leave them out.

[3] *Paradise Lost*, i. 549.

it is described to the life because his description has ended on an emotional chord.

The effect of a long poem, of which it is so difficult to speak, is also similar. It has as a whole impressed our feeling.[1] Sometimes its effect is single and indivisible, as is the case with Morris's *Sigurd*, the *Æneid*, or Longfellow's *Evangeline* :—

'Told she the tale of the fair Lilianu who was wooed by a phantom.'

Sometimes the impression left is the impression of a series of emotional effects, as in Tennyson's *Idylls*, or, in lesser degree, the *Odyssey*, or still less, because the separate effects are so like, *The Faery Queen* or *The Prelude*. In those last cases, though one does not quite get a single impression, the separate impressions are so similar as to produce cumulatively almost the effect of unity. Sometimes, though the impression is the impression of a whole, that impression is not poetical, as with *The Ring and the Book*, and this is because the whole, allowing for surprising spurts of emotion, is the result of an intellectual process.

It is not easy to define poetry—a dream, a sigh, an exhalation :—

'This lady of the luting tongue,
The flash in darkness, billow's grace.'

Mr. Meredith has indeed attempted it :—

'That was the chirp of Ariel
You heard, as overhead it flew,
The farther going more to dwell,
And wing our green to wed our blue ;

[1] And such is the effect sometimes even of prose dramas, *e.g.* Tourgenieff's most beautiful play *The Bread of Others*. There are few poetical passages in it, but the effect of the whole is the effect of a poem.

But whether note of joy or knell,
Not his own Father-singer knew ;
Nor yet can any mortal tell,
Save only how it shivers through ;
The breast of us a sounded shell,
The blood of us a lighted dew.'

That was poetry, that which we seemed to hear just now ; and the more faint, the more the sound seemed to die off into an illimitable vague and to be lost in the infinite, the more it haunts us and helps to uplift our grosser part into communion with our spirit, which itself is part of the spirit of all. But whether this ecstasy derived from poetry is in a strict sense pleasurable no one can tell, not even the chief of poetry-makers, Shakespeare, himself. Our eyes are 'wet with most delicious tears.' We cannot say much more than that, except that a real poetical experience makes our being vibrate as nothing else can. We seem, for the moment, ourselves to be participant in the making of this heavenly harmony ; seem to emit, like the dewdrop touched with the sun, a light which is our own.[1]

[1] For this paraphrase of a difficult little poem, I am greatly indebted to Mr. Trevelyan's detailed explanation, *The Poetry and Philosophy of George Meredith*, pp. 72-74.

GRAY

If we understood anything perfectly, we should understand everything. It is equally true that to understand anything perfectly, we must understand everything. Yet one must make shift to deal with the eighteenth century in England without attempting an analysis of the precedent civilisations of Greece and Rome; civilisations in which the art of living had been cultivated to a high degree, but ultimately destroyed, partly by the incursion of barbarians, partly by the growth of Christianity, a religion which made war against the pride of the world. There arose, in what we call the Dark Ages, what we know as the Monastic Ideal, a mode of thought which drew the finer spirits away from life and absorbed them in the contemplation of death and a life to come, leaving meanwhile the earth itself, denuded of ideals, a prey to the strong and violent man. The true Salamanca University was then the cloister, and outside 'the loud-roaring hail-storms' fell. What remains to us from those ages of quietism and riot is the memory of bloody deeds, often of high tragic value, and of a selected existence solacing itself in seclusion.

The first signs of the serious re-emergence of the human spirit synchronise roughly with the Latin Empire of Constantinople, when interest in Roman learning and Roman culture, never wholly forgotten

by the Church, had for some time begun to revive. The greatest achievement of the Roman genius was legal, and one feature of this Latin revival or Pre-renascence was a greatly increased interest in the Pandects. Places for learning were established, and within a space of fifty years there were founded the Universities of Paris, Oxford, Siena, Naples, Padua, Cambridge and Salamanca.

If we are to think of this movement as a renascence, we must date the Renascence itself as beginning in the thirteenth and not in the fifteenth century. In truth, the whole process is gradual; from those Latin beginnings through Aquinas, Roger Bacon, Dante and Petrarch and the new spirit of 'Gothicness' animating Gothic architecture, to the fully quickened interest in Greek literature which distinguishes the Renascence proper.

Yet, however gradual the process, we can trace in the sixteenth century an immense new impetus coming to England. Erasmus came here in 1497. The last voyage of Columbus ended in 1504. Luther died in 1546. The great work of Copernicus had been published in 1543.

That group of dates marks the end of the old world in England and the opening of the new. There is more difference between Chaucer's mental world and Shakespeare's than between Shakespeare's and our own. Our Shakespeare—and for this reason he is our Shakespeare—stands on the threshold of modern times. It was for him to enter into the realisation of a planet half unknown; when you came to the end of what you knew there was everywhere an open door, 'antres vast and deserts idle,' in which there might be Eldorado, New Atlantis, Utopia.

The old world — what was it? A flat disc, lit pleasantly by a travelling sun and moon with attendant ladies in diamonds, sometimes in bright gold, the patines with which the heavens were thick inlaid; a flat disc—*terra firma*, round which there was *mare magnum*, the sea.

A new earth and a new heaven faced the Elizabethans, and this both in a material and a spiritual sense. In religion it was coming to be recognised that the last word had not been said. A hundred years after Grocyn had taught Erasmus, the intellectuals everywhere had inherited the humane labours of the scholars, and in England, while Shakespeare was still young, Greece, with her old new literature, lived again. There dawned upon the view undreamed-of civilisations, and an endless vista of speculation in religion, morals, politics. In that age you could discover new lands; there were disclosed, waiting to be explored, new continents of thought. What a field for the imagination to play in![1]

The great age of imagination in England was thus the Elizabethan Age, the age of emotional treatment, of generalisation. All sides of man were presented poetically, whether it was his philosophical and reflective side as with Bacon, his inquiring and historiographical side as with Raleigh, or as with Shakespeare his poetical side: in that age even poetry was pre-eminently poetical.

Upon the sixteenth century in England there followed the seventeenth century — one must call it

[1] Cp. Spenser's *Faery Queen*, Book ii. v. 3:

'Why then should witlesse man so much misweene,
That nothing is, but that which he hath seene?'

the seventeenth century, for there is no other single phrase that will define a period that is notable as an ending, a thing in itself, and a beginning. After the blowing of great winds there is a lull. The English imagination had said its say, and the seventeenth century is primarily to be characterised as a period in literature of imaginative exhaustion. The poets, at any rate, had nothing new of consequence to tell. The big things about the beginning had been said. From this point of view, then, the seventeenth century is the end of the sixteenth century.

But it exists for itself; there is no quiescence; the oscillation continues; the waves, though not mountains high, still rock. Close upon the heels of the great age of poetry treads the age of artifice. In poetry, trifles, prettiness, a careless shoe-string, dressed-up theology, tricks of phrase, take the place of the imaginative revel. One poet was still writing great poetry, but his was the poetry of lament: with the failure of his political hopes for man, Paradise was lost. In prose too, though there was a much more various effort, there was the same lack of large and definite purpose. People wrote, in any style or no style, on what they pleased. Sir Thomas Browne and Lord Herbert, Urquhart, Harrington or Burton, Izaak Walton, Feltham, Hobbes—there is no sequence. In brief, the seventeenth century, which in England doesn't last for nearly a century (1610 to 1670 perhaps), is the kind of century that has little interest, the kind of century one would expect—a transition century, being in part the tossing to and fro after the storm, and in part the first faint beginnings of the eighteenth century. One does see emerging from the disturbance

the first faint beginnings of a school of history, of social politics, the first faint beginnings of a school interested in character. Before the seventeenth century had ended, the eighteenth century had begun.

Of all modern centuries the eighteenth century is the most indispensable; it was the necessary preliminary to the building of a completely modern life. The course of nineteenth-century literature might well have been different, and the men of to-day would still have been what they are. What was indispensable was the laying of the foundations. When the eighteenth century[1] began in England (let us say in 1670, when men had settled down after the Revolution and Restoration) it was recognised on every hand that the modern world had begun. The new ideas of the sixteenth century had to some extent been assimilated; the new discoveries were being understood. A truly modern society was coming into existence. To investigate its principles, the necessary conditions of its life, that was the task of the eighteenth century, or in Mr. Courthope's phrases, its task 'was to recombine the shattered forms of the old national life into a system suited to modern circumstances,' . . . 'the work of the eighteenth century consisted in providing a safe mode of transition from the manners of mediæval to those of modern society.'

The work of the eighteenth century was a work of investigation, classification, arrangement. No longer have we Shakespeare standing tip-toe in face of a rush

[1] The eighteenth century is the process of getting things in order. It therefore begins with the first signs of order. Sir William Temple is in spirit and tone an eighteenth-century writer, and he died in 1699.

of new ideas. Modern man is no longer surprised at his own emergence: on the contrary, he sits down to contemplate himself; his business now is to inquire how he came into being, and what, in fact, he is. It is not by chance that civilisations differ from each other, and the name of Gibbon reminds us of the time when history was discovered to be a science. Men have different opinions, but the movements of the mind, says Hume, are explicable. It was Newton and Herschel who explained that we lived in a Universe and not a Chaos. By 1750 William Hunter was lecturing at the school of surgery in London. Black and Priestley in chemistry attest the activity of the new science of medicine. Before the century was ended Bentham had laid firmly the foundation of a science of legislation.[1] Nor was this interest in investigation and analysis without a general manifestation. A new interest in man and his character prompted even the imagination to fresh efforts. *Gulliver's Travels* was Swift's reply to a sociological inquiry. If you asked Defoe: How would man comport himself in solitude? the answer was 'Robinson Crusoe.' Some observation of the ways of human beings in the country preceded the papers devoted to Sir Roger de Coverley. Character study was the chief impulse to imaginative composition, and Richardson, Fielding, Sterne spin out their stories with no other end.

What then had the eighteenth century to do? It had, standing on the shoulders of the sixteenth century,

[1] It was the same abroad. Le Sage, Montesquieu, Bayle, Voltaire all equally indicate the new desire to analyse man, his habits and beliefs, and to found a new beginning starting from that analysis.

to deal with modern man. It could not give free rein to an emotional treatment because, not to speak of the sixteenth century having exhausted emotion, it was just because too free a rein had been given to varying and passing emotions that the seventeenth century had not done more of the work of the eighteenth. Nor could the eighteenth century deal with man on simple and broad lines. Since the sixteenth century, the whole complicated basis of modern life had been laid. It was the office of the eighteenth century to deal with crowds and allow for variety, with cities and to speak with urbanity.

This was the time of the cognoscenti, the literati, the day for the clear intellect, the years of marking time, the period in which what was already roughly known was mapped out; a geological survey of what was habitable human country. Such map-making was essential to subsequent progress. To employ a commercial metaphor, in the eighteenth century stock was taken of the business of mankind, and to put a business on a satisfactory footing is a preliminary to profitable results.

Yet in itself the business of stocktaking is unemotional. It was the business of the eighteenth century, but it was a business extremely ill suited to poetry.

The true interests of the eighteenth century were political, social, historical, the interests of prose; and while the poets of the eighteenth century were right in this that they spoke of the real interests[1] of the

[1] Mr. Courthope quotes Pope as taking credit (*Epistle to Arbuthnot*)

> 'That not in fancy's maze he wander'd long,
> But stooped to truth, and moralised his song.'

eighteenth century, for this reason their poetry is weak—at least, this is why it is weak as poetry.

If it be said they were free to take another course, they were free, in that case, only to write poetry which did not reflect their age, and which, therefore, whatever its aesthetic elegance, would have been worthless.

It is true that their success in the course they chose —the only course really open to them—was but partial. What is remarkable, considering the nature of their task, is that they should have achieved success at all. For the sudden task that confronted them was not merely to extend the domain of poetry, it was to extend it to cover minutiae and detail. Poetry was to conquer, and immediately, a whole new province, the province of social life. If Poetry was to be a true daughter of the eighteenth century, she was to learn, within fifty years of the publication of *Paradise Lost*, to speak the language of criticism—a criticism of religion, morals, politics, the seasons, society and regimen.

How was such a task to be accomplished, and who has yet written the poem on mending a wheelbarrow which Dr. Craik instanced as an exercise in the familiar?

Part of the danger lay in the consciousness of difficulty. The Elizabethans spoke, without a thought of what they chose, because they did not wish to speak of anything that had not a primary imaginative appeal. But the eighteenth-century poets stood trembling on the verge of a new land. No great emotional impulse was behind them ; what impelled them to their adventure was merely the love of method and good sense.

Unemotional people, who are also intelligent, act according to habit, and it is in every case the habit of those who are afraid of speaking too familiarly to cover their shamefacedness with a delicacy of speech. In other words, the difficulty that faced the eighteenth-century poets was that the subjects of which they especially wished to speak were not specially susceptible of poetical treatment; and so to meet this difficulty they invented a manner that, on the surface, was avowedly poetical—a dignified, sometimes pretentious style, meant to disguise the prosaic nature of their task.[1] Thus even Cowper, remembering how fond his mother was of him and how on his way to

[1] There are many instances of the designedly and falsely dignified in Cowper's 'Lines on receiving his Mother's Picture,' instances which alternate most curiously with instances of the poignantly simple. For example, compare this address to his mother's spirit:

> 'Thou, as a gallant bark from Albion's coast
> (The storms all weather'd, and the ocean cross'd),
> Shoots into port at some well-haven'd isle,
> Where spices breathe, and brighter seasons smile,
> There sits quiescent on the floods, that show
> Her beauteous form reflected clear below,
> While airs impregnated with incense play
> Around her, fanning light her streamers gay;
> So thou, with sails how swift! hast reach'd the shore
> "Where tempests never beat nor billows roar,"'

with the immortally affecting lines:

> 'Where once we dwelt our name is heard no more,
> Children not thine have trod my nursery floor;
> And where the gardener Robin, day by day,
> Drew me to school along the public way,
> Delighted with my bauble coach, and wrapp'd
> In scarlet mantle warm, and velvet cap,
> 'Tis now become a history little known,
> That once we call'd the pastoral house our own.'

school she stuffed his pockets with sweets, writes like this when he is afraid :—

> 'Thy morning bounties ere I left my home,
> The biscuit, or confectionary plum.'

Having to speak of many familiar and trivial subjects, the poets, by an instinct of self-protection, adopted a high-sounding speech.

Another way to meet the difficulty, and it was the way they all attempted later, was to restrict the range of subject, to rule out as too obviously familiar many trifles, and to speak only of the more dignified among familiar things. But a designed selection of this kind, the habit of the mind resting on the notion of dignity, could not but correspondingly affect, however insensibly, the tone of the style. The tendency to select the matter led necessarily to a tendency to select the manner.

So that however they approached their task, the very nature of their task, as also the methodical method of their approach, prescribed one ending. If they selected their subjects there was a tendency to select a correspondent tone. If they did not select their subjects there was a temptation, for purposes of self-protection, to adopt a disguising manner. In either case the style adopted was similar, the style that we now know as heroic.

Nor is this the end of a painful poetical story. The adoption of a selected style tended further to restrict the subject. It may not be easy in poetry to speak of sweets, but it is shortly seen to be impossible to speak of a confectionary plum. High-sounding subjects are the only subjects that can be spoken of in this way.

If you are to use Latin you must write of Æneas and of Dido.

By this process poetry, by the end of the century, was tied up in a corner. The artifice in the manner tended further to restrict the subjects; the further restriction of subjects tended further to artificialise the style. To find the remedy was to free both together, and to free both together was the work of the Romantic Revival.

Looking back on the history of the eighteenth-century process, we can see the curious spectacle of an aim negativing itself. The restrictions to which poetry submitted in the eighteenth century were endured for a purpose. The general design was to extend the sphere of poetry; with the object of extending her sphere, concessions were made to habit and reason, and in the end these concessions were the cause of a restriction thrice restricted.

Not all the writers, of course, nor even all the periods of the eighteenth century carried their system to its logical result, but sheer triumphs of social poetry such as Goldsmith's *Deserted Village* are few.[1] In the main, the eighteenth-century poetry, even at its best, gives itself airs. Pope's points are too consciously pithy; Thomson in his *Seasons* carries it, though with elegance, too high; and Johnson's voice, though dignified in his *London*, is loud. At a lower elevation, the poetry of this century is mere stilts. What, however, is chiefly irritating is that it is seldom either bad or good, but more commonly both. In the most characteristic piece left to us, Johnson's tribute to the dead surgeon, we

[1] The pompous quatrain at the end is Johnson's.

have both what the century tried to do occasionally perfectly done, and also the poetical style defensive openly displayed :—

'Condemn'd to Hope's delusive mine,
As on we toil from day to day,
By sudden blasts, or slow decline,
Our social comforts drop away.'

The second and fourth lines are unexceptionable, while the first is beyond redemption.

'Well try'd through many a varying year,
See Levet to the grave descend,
Officious, innocent, sincere,
Of ev'ry friendless name the friend.

Yet still he fills Affection's eye,
Obscurely wise, and coarsely kind ;
Nor, letter'd Arrogance, deny
Thy praise to merit unrefin'd.'

These touching verses, without the seventh and eighth lines, would have no blemish of artificiality, but the particularity of the praise is the particularity of a prose age, an age capable of emotion yet typically critical.

'When fainting nature called for aid,
And hov'ring death prepar'd the blow,
His vig'rous remedy display'd
The pow'r of art without the show.

In misery's darkest cavern known,
His useful care was ever nigh,
Where hopeless anguish poured his groan,
And lonely want retired to die.'

Though the fourth line, a mere contortion, may dim the moderate badness of the rest, it would be impossible in eight lines to epitomise better the deficiencies of the method.

There are more stanzas:—

'No summons mock'd by chill delay,
No petty gain disdain'd by pride,
The modest wants of ev'ry day
The toil of ev'ry day supply'd.

His virtues walk'd their narrow round,
Nor made a pause, nor left a void;
And sure th' Eternal Master found
The single talent well employ'd.'

How did the eighteenth century come to write like this? By no miracle. So always the eighteenth century could have written, had it never written till it was emotionally moved by its survey. Here the weight of Johnson's feeling carries him through the convention. But if we wish an example of what the eighteenth century could do, we shall have to leave Johnson and turn to Gray.[1]

. . . . .

[1] No account of the eighteenth century can omit mention of the romantic side-current, the romantic work, which was not its work, done in it, the romantic work done by the way. The passages at the end of Pope's *Messiah* and *Dunciad* are not typical eighteenth-century work. Shenstone in his *Schoolmistress*, though the subject is purely social, speaks often the language of poetry. Thomson, in his *Castle of Indolence*, is the first to anticipate the antique music of Keats, and Collins's *Ode to Evening* is not placeable in time. Dryden, in Mr. Courthope's fine phrase, 'the immediate father of the whole line,' is distinguished as much for the airy grace of some of his lyrics as for the merits of his day.

'And still at every close,' he says in *The Flower and the Leaf*—

'And still at every close she would repeat
The burden of the song, The daisy is so sweet,
The daisy is so sweet.'

This was got from the weak thing in the Chaucerian version—

'For, as me thought, among her notes swete
She said *Si douse est la Margarete*.'

And Arnold has noticed the romantic note in Gray's letters: 'At Keswick, by the lakeside on an autumn evening, he has the accent

Gray is entirely of the eighteenth century, its best product in poetry, a perfect example of the utmost poetical greatness to which an unpoetical age, remaining wholly true to itself, can by possibility attain. He does not suffer from its formal vices. An exponent of the heroical style, he uses this style on heroical subjects alone. He writes little to match the dull pomposity of the *Alliance of Education and Government*, a poem dear to Gibbon and examiners. His lyrical excellence is as great as was possible for one who had no note of spontaneous song. As his subjects increase in gravity his tone becomes more measured, more natural.

These are great merits; he has, in fact, every merit attainable by his century, and he lacks those qualities alone that are truly poetical. He lacks spontaneity, swiftness, and the immediate transference of his feeling to paper. He is too slow, too polished, too reflective. But his work is immensely good; the tone of his mind is serious and human, and had he been characteristically a poet he would have been a poet of a great order.

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of the Rêveries, or of Obermann, or Wordsworth':—'In the evening walked alone down to the lake by the side of Crow Park after sunset and saw the solemn colouring of light draw on, the last gleam of sunshine fading away on the hill-tops, the deep serene of the waters, and the long shadows of the mountains thrown across them, till they nearly touched the hithermost shore. At distance heard the murmur of many waterfalls not audible in the daytime. Wished for the moon, but she was "*dark to me and silent, hid in her vacant interlunar cave.*"'

Mr. Hudson in his *Introduction to the Study of Literature* has this statement: 'The publication of some fifty poems, small and large, in the Spenserian form, and often on subjects for which that form was not in the least appropriate, in the half-century between 1725 and 1775, is itself a sign of awakening interest during those years in Spenser and his work,' p. 161.

Indeed, I believe if one were to ask oneself what is poetry, one could not do better than look at his poems side by side with those of Burns. All that Burns writes is not poetry—by no means—and all that Gray writes is not prose. I do not say so; but the one, with all his faults, sees the world from the standpoint of the poet; the other, with all his merits, from the point of view of his century, the sober, intensely English eighteenth century, from the point of view of a writer of prose.

I open the little book at its first page, at the lines on the Spring, and I pass by the conventional opening—

> 'the rosy bosom'd Hours,
> Fair Venus' train,'

with its unreal mythology and the muse that sits and thinks—what she never does do, she leaps and springs—and I also pass by the jerky disconnection of the ostensibly connected reflection, till I find Gray's mind occupied with the thought, the theme of every poet, as of every prose-writer since the world began—the thought of the equality of Death:—

> 'Alike the Busy and the Gay
> But flutter through life's little day,
> In Fortune's varying colours dress'd:
> Brush'd by the hand of rough Mischance,
> Or chill'd by Age, their airy dance
> They leave, in dust to rest.'

Yes, it is true. But hear Shakespeare on the same subject:—

> 'Golden lads and girls all must,
> As chimney-sweepers, come to dust.'

It is the contrast between a trite reflection, a general comment on the course of human life, as just as it is common, and an old feeling newly felt.

In the one case the poet feels a surprising instance with a surprising newness, leaps to his general truth, and makes us feel it by the ardour with which he seizes on the particular. In the other, the prose nature takes his time and sweeps his eyes around.

An old man has weak hams and sleeps lightly. That is true. To the old man, says the Eastern poet, his fancy seizing on their persistent morning chirruping, the grasshopper is a burden. How much more, and how much more incisively true!

This it is to feel as a poet. But Gray does not commonly feel as a poet. I do not mean that he does not feel; he feels, and with a justice and at times a depth of sentiment so great that he is immortal. The immortal commentator upon the passing show, Gray has passed more pithy and more just reflections upon our leasehold tenure here than any other Englishman. Of such reflections the 'Ode on Eton College' is full. Everyone knows the finest lines in that poem:—

> 'All are men,
> Condemn'd alike to groan;
> The tender for another's pain,
> The unfeeling for his own.'

It is impossible to imagine the saddest of human truths expressed more beautifully or with a more perfect melancholy. It is finer, far finer, than the poetical flashes in the piece:—

> 'They hear a voice in every wind,
> And snatch a fearful joy,'

or

> 'Alas! regardless of their doom,
> The little victims play.'

It is finer because, without the poetical brilliance of these, the lightning flash, it is staider, more in tone with the subject, more said for ever, more excellent. Yes, but it is a prose excellence. That a prose excellence was wanted here should not disguise this from us. The 'Ode on Eton College' is a perfect prose triumph —popular just for that, since the public has difficulty in understanding poetry,—a prose triumph with its careful enumeration of the woes of age, with its perfect enumeration of the unnoticed delights of youth :—

'The thoughtless day, the easy night.'

How does it happen with Gray where he essays a flight more distinctively poetical? He has written many Odes. They have been greatly admired, and many have facilely tried to imitate their laboured excellence. The imitators have failed. They did not realise that, however lacking these Odes might be in a strictly poetical excellence, they are the production of a man who had observed life carefully and who never wrote a line that was not pregnant with the meaning of a real experience. For ourselves, if we were to speak openly and not as children of yesterday, we would confess at once that these Odes, with all their admirable merits, leave us cold. We can admire the justice of the sentiments, without feeling that inner warmth of feeling that communicates its warmth. Some old things may be said in such a way that we seem to feel them for the first time :—

'No motion has she now, no force;
She neither hears nor sees;
Rolled round in earth's diurnal course,
With rocks, and stones, and trees.'

A woman in an old Scots ballad addresses the ghost of her murdered lover whose wraith she is painfully following :—

> 'Sae painfully she clam the wa',
> She clam the wa' up after him ;
> Hosen nor shoon upon her feet,
> She hadna time to put them on.
>
> "Is there ony room at your head, Saunders?
> Is there ony room at your feet?
> Or ony room at your side, Saunders,
> Where fain, fain, I wad sleep?"'

These old things may be said in some such way, and new things may be said without making new men of us. I do not know that Gray says many new things in his Odes, but the old things do not move.

It is impossible to imagine sentiments more just than those with which the 'Ode to Adversity' is crowded. But it is precisely this, their exact justice, that keeps the Ode within the domain of prose. What should I ask from Adversity?—

> 'Teach me to love, and to forgive,
> Exact my own defects to scan.'

One *should* do so, but it is too near a perfect propriety. There is here neither the cry of the 'liméd soul' that struggles to be free, nor the ecstasy of virtue :—

> 'To humbler functions, awful Power.'

To Wordsworth duty is awful, awful because he is a poet and feels the frailty of man.

We may pass a similar criticism upon the more ambitious efforts, 'The Progress of Poesy' and 'The Bard'; nor must the studiedly poetical language

conceal from us that those pieces also are the work of one who was pre-eminently a critic, the justest and most discriminating of critics, but at bottom a critic still. Take a passage that looks like poetry :—

'O'er Idalia's velvet green
The rosy-crowned Loves are seen
On Cytherea's day
With antic Sport, and blue-eyed Pleasures,
Frisking light in frolic measures ;
Now pursuing, now retreating,
Now in circling troops they meet :
To brisk notes in cadence beating,
Glance their many-twinkling feet.'

No criticism of the dance, no sympathetic exposition of the charm of quick and intertwining motion could be better. What a genius is necessary so to represent! The dance with its changing measure is seen ; the accompanying music with its change of time is actually heard. But the poetry of motion ! We have only to remember :—

'When you do dance, I wish you
A wave o' the sea, that you might ever do
Nothing but that ; move still, still so,
And own no other function.'

It is interpretation as opposed to presentment, a thing felt as against a thing seen, the rhythmic motion getting itself expressed in the undesigned arrangement of four words :—

'Move still, still so.'

Shakespeare does not always write poetry ; but wherever he is pre-eminently good, he makes his effect by a reliance on the poetical method. He is thus pre-eminently a poet. Gray does not always write prose ;

but wherever he is pre-eminently good we find, with few exceptions, that his method is the method of prose. His genius is thus pre-eminently a prose genius.

But how admirable are the efforts of this genius; how penetrating is the criticism, how 'exact to scan'!

Shakespeare was what? 'Nature's Darling,' 'immortal Boy,' an unstudied genius full to the last of the juicy sallies of youth; and Milton that 'rode sublime,' the exact adjective, 'upon the seraph wings of Ecstacy'; and Dryden, and Pindar—

> 'Sailing with supreme dominion
> Through the azure deep of air.'

'The Bard' and the 'Ode for Music' are poems not to be admired so greatly. They are too like poetry; without being poetry, too like it. The effort, the laboured effort, to simulate the fine frenzy is disconcerting. We miss our familiar Gray.

He is there, of course, just as good a critic as ever, and never a vulgar critic. When the gross vulgar, for example, think of Henry the Eighth, they think of a fat man with six beheaded wives. Yet some memory of Mr. Froude may intervene, and of what Carlyle said to Sir Charles Gavan Duffy, who, demurring to Carlyle's statement that Henry knew what he wanted, 'suggested that, among the things he wanted and knew how to get, was as long a roll of wives as the Grand Turk. It would have been a more humane method to have taken them, like that potentate, simultaneously than successively; he would have been saved the need of killing one to make room for another, and then requiring Parliament to disgrace itself by sanctioning the transaction.

'Carlyle replied that this method of looking at King

Henry's life did not help much to the understanding of it. He was a true ruler at a time when the will of the Lord's anointed counted for something, and it was likely that he did not regard himself as doing wrong in any of these things over which modern sentimentality grew so impatient.' And so Gray :—

'the majestic lord,
That broke the bonds of Rome.'

And again of the Tower, which we are apt to think of with a curious national pride :—

'Ye towers of Julius, London's lasting shame,
With many a foul and midnight murder fed.'

But in the main, 'The Bard' is a poem in which the critical side of Gray is not prominently seen. He establishes a reputation as an historical scene-painter, and the whole procession of English history from the Edwards passes in learned, if laboured, review :—

'The shrieks of death, through Berkley's roof that ring.'

'Low on his funeral couch he lies !'

'Her lion-port,
Her awe-commanding face.'

But somehow I cannot think that the old prophet about to plunge in the roaring tide would have been so particular. 'The Bard' is an attempt to give to an historical account the hurry and rapture of poetry ; and this attempt succeeds. 'The Bard' is a hurried, rapturous, and precise performance. It has some of the characteristics of poetry without being poetry. It has the particularity of prose without the leisure to be prose. It is executed as a poet would execute it, but it is not conceived as a poet would conceive it. It is an attempt to make poetry by adding the adjuncts of a poem to a distinctively eighteenth-century task.

Classification, criticism, history, are to be flogged into a canter.

The Elegy is a performance of a different kind. The poetry that is in it is not an adjunct to it, but arises out of it, the inner depth of the feeling warming to a slow fire. Far and away the greatest thing Gray did, it is the most difficult of which to speak; for while it is a product of prose, a creature of the prose imagination, and while there are only a few lines that, detached from the context, are strictly speaking poetry, the effect of the whole is not a prose effect but a poetical effect. When we have read it through we feel as if we had been listening to poetry. The reason is that the conception is poetical, eminently so, and it is only the execution, the carrying out, the imaginative development that belongs to the domain of prose.

Death, the term — for the Elegy stops with the grave and leaves alone the question of a hereafter— Death, the finis to mortal aspiration and delight, forms a subject in contemplating which the prose-writer feels his being stirred to a depth that is poetical. On this subject, finis, the prose-writer and the poet meet, so to speak, on common ground. There is so little to say, and one's feelings, even the feelings of an ordinary man, are so universal that the poetical movement of the mind and the prose movement base on a similarity of feeling that ends in an expression not dissimilar.

For this reason Gray's Elegy has an unusually wide appeal. The poetical reader feels with the poet, and the prose nature is able easily to follow the beautiful expatiation.

Let me explain what I mean by saying that the conception of the Elegy is poetical, while its execution is a work of prose. Its execution is a prose execution because the simple subject is exhausted. It is not suddenly or surprisingly felt. The slow considering mind reflects upon a country graveyard till there has arisen in the mind every *just* reflection, and till there has been embodied in words every *just* sentiment which the occasion could, by possibility, evoke.

It is evening, and the evening is still. Still, did I say? A beetle may be heard, and an owl. Around one lie the country graves. The poor inhabitants below will no more rise to their usual tasks (these tasks then being carefully enumerated). These usual tasks were homely, but this is no reason why we should despise them. Tasks, however grand, and lives, however glorious, come to the same stop. It is true the great are honoured with costlier monuments, but this does not affect the fact of death. Besides, who knows? had there been ampler opportunity, these humble dead might, alive, have done great things (these great things being then carefully enumerated). John Nokes and Richard Stokes might have been Hampden or Milton, a great writer or a great statesman. But even if it is true, as true it is, that they were not great or greatly good, it is also true that they were not greatly bad (the possible developments of great badness being then carefully enumerated). They weren't greatly good or greatly bad. Let that be allowed, and it remains they were men, unnoticed men, whose deaths were regretted as greater deaths have been. It is a sad thing for any one to die, to leave pleasant life and to bid farewell to friends.

Indeed, if one were to inquire of me who write this what could be said of me, my epitaph would not really amount to much more than theirs. Some one, no doubt, would say he saw the harmless poet walking forth at dawn, and lying under the great beech, now happy, now sad—one morning missing. There was afterwards, indeed, a rustic funeral and a few lines on a tomb, which said: A man of compassionate and friendly heart lies here. He had his frailties, but now let there be silence, for all that he has is a narrow bed, with hope for a companion did you say? Yes, with trembling hope.

I say this execution is a prose execution because it is a prose execution; it is mapped out and proceeds from point to point like a little school-essay of which the analysis has been written before hand. It is a prose execution because it is not a poetical execution; there are none of the sudden starts, sallies, surprises of poetry. Heine has been looking at a tomb. This is the fate that overtakes all; it is common, but then—

> 'Quite suddenly it came into my head
> The dead man in the marble tomb was I.'

It has none of these sallies, and, moreover, it is never beaten by the depth of its own feeling, nor comes to a stop, like Shakespeare's terrifying 'signifying nothing.' But while this is so, the conception is poetical. The subject is not suddenly or surprisingly felt, but it is singly felt, felt as a whole. It was a poet's thought to be so deeply moved by what is common, to feel so profoundly just one truth. We are mortal, alike in this, in our mortality; and to keep saying this—in different ways, it is true, but

still saying it and nothing else—is a great thing. To trust to the effect of one profoundly felt feeling, this is the true faith of the poet; to be contented with the emanation of a sigh,[1] not to press eagerly or to attempt to startle, but merely to let one's feeling flow—one's feeling, whether it is a surprising or a merely deep feeling, this is the true attitude of the poet. Sometimes I think this Elegy is the greatest, the most universal thing in the world; it so perfectly expresses the feelings of man as man, of an erect, peripatetic biped one day to lie quiet and at full length.

It is also, I know, the boast of a purely poetical poetry that it is universal, but in speaking of the greatest poetry we may easily give too wide a meaning to this term. Its claim to universality can be justified only in so far as all great poetry despises everything adventitious, and speaks of human nature as human nature. What we really mean when we say that great poetry is universal, is that her interests are not limited in width; that she speaks *of* all, of what lies at the roots of things; that she can be understood equally well by a German or a Chinaman, by man or woman:—

> 'By saint, by savage, and by sage,
> In every clime, adored.'

What, however, we do not mean when we claim universality for great poetry is that she speaks *for* all, or voices the sentiments equally of the imaginative and

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[1] Why should the emanation of a sigh give comfort? The Elegy is a poem that does not speak of hope, and yet it brings comfort to every mind. If we ask why it should do so perhaps the best answer is Shelley's

> 'Thus solemnised and softened, death is mild.'

Stanzas in Lechlade Churchyard, 1815.

the unimaginative, the sensitive and the vulgar. We do not mean that her office is simply to give utterance to feelings on the tip of every tongue. On the contrary, poetry is an aristocrat, though an aristocrat full of understanding. At her highest, she speaks of depths the common man has never sounded, of stillnesses known only to the patient and reflective. Poetry, let us say, speaks of everything, but not as every one thinks about it. The highest and purest poetry is thus not able to boast truly of complete universality ; it is at best an interpretative universality to which she can reach. We shall never be able, let us be sure of this, solely to express an absolutely universal feeling, to give shape to a merely human sigh, unless we keep firm hold of the prose side of our nature. When Shakespeare, for instance, writes

> 'And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
> The way to dusty death,'

this is, we see after thinking about it, a ray of light shed on the procrastinating habit of the mind ; yet most clearly it is not what every one thinks or is yearning to say. In the splendid indignation of 'fools' we hear Shakespeare's own voice, the particular bubbling over of Shakespeare's own wrath at an unvarying human habit. Ordinary men do not feel like that, do not think like that, and to speak in that way is not to voice their feeling.

In a word, a purely poetical age will never merely *voice* the sorrows of mankind ; it could never have produced and will never produce so direct an expression of universal grief as this prose eighteenth century, as this tender, melancholy poet Gray, with the critic and the slow prose man so much alive in him.

A purely poetical age could not have produced a

poem so much on a level, so perfectly in one note, so exquisitely in tone.

And how exquisite is the tact of Gray! In the poem as it was written, at the end there were two stanzas, one about the poet :—

'Him have we seen the greenwood side along,
While o'er the heath we hied, our labour done,
Oft as the woodlark piped her farewell song,
With wistful eyes pursue the setting sun.'

It was pretty, but it had a particularity of its own; it was the kind of thing to be said about a poetical poet, not of the poet standing merely for man poetically moved. Moreover, its particularity detracted from the plain simplicity with which the figure is introduced. Gray's tact condemned it. The other is a more obvious lapse. It was to be inserted just before the epitaph :—

'There scatter'd oft, the earliest of the year,
By hands unseen are showers of violets found;
The redbreast loves to build and warble there,
And little footsteps lightly print the ground.'

One must not blame a poet for what he has deleted; but what are we to think of the poetical standard of an age the chief glory of which, writing the elegy on man, stops to paint this lovely little Christmas card?

There is another and more important omission. There was an early stanza now commonly printed by editors without the tact of the poet as the fourth :—

'Hark! how the sacred calm that breathes around,
Bids every fierce tumultuous passion cease;
In still small accents whispering from the ground,
A grateful earnest of eternal peace.'

No; this had to go—for the poem was about Finis. The poem was about Finis, and it is because of this it

speaks for every man. It voices with perfect propriety, and without the intrusion of a single individual thought, the one deeply felt feeling that every man has in contemplating a graveyard.

I do not say that there is any man who has not at times other feelings. Who is there so presumptuous as to say he knows that behind the curtain there is nothing? Who is there, by his own hypothesis ephemeral, who is prepared to say he knows that to no issue there is lived our perplexing life? Indeed, I think that most men in their common thoughts assume themselves immortal and look beyond the grave. One is alive and one remembers life, those who made it what it was, and those bright eyes, not to shine forever, that cheer it now; and one's mounting spirit moves. One sees beyond as in a vision, and death, no longer dulling the horizon, slips down beneath one's feet.

But in the quiet of a churchyard, coming suddenly on it from the city's hum, in Greyfriars on an August day, or by a playing-ground in Chelsea, somewhere nestling near a lowland hill—the contrast between my own present life and those slabs, or rolls of turf—it is this that immediately affects me. Life is a going on, a tumult, an upstanding; and here is something beneath one, lying prone, surrounded by an oppressive quiet, and willy-nilly brought to rest. Gay lovers, and young maidens, and old chilly men who asked for another year. I think so and I am sorry for them :—

> 'For who, to dumb forgetfulness a prey,
> This pleasing anxious being e'er resign'd,
> Left the warm precincts of the cheerful day,
> Nor cast one longing lingering look behind?'

You feel it quivering into poetry, the beautiful equable

reflection stirring by its own intensity towards the highest speech of man, that form of speech which affects us like the light; and you know, as you hear, that there are greater and more illuminating flights of the human spirit than prose can find words for—strange trembling outbursts of the panting soul about whose dread passage into silence this Elegy was written and to unnumbered ages will speak.

BURNS

THE eighteenth-century movement in Poetry destroyed itself, and had the course of political history continued undisturbed, Pope's verses would still have been replaced by Scott's. The genius of literature never commits suicide, and the knot into which Poetry had tied herself would have been untied by causes purely literary. The instrument the eighteenth century had fashioned—an instrument which, like a club in a fable, grew in its hands—proved ultimately too unwieldy for use. To write on selected subjects in a selected style was not permanently possible. The road ended in a cul-de-sac: it was necessary to try again, and to hark back to another opening. We can see the tangle untwining itself in some of the poetry of Cowper, in some of the poetry of Burns, in some of the poetry of Scott.

Cowper, at his best a poet of a singular simplicity, no doubt often chooses subjects, such as the public-school system,[1] that have rather a social and educational than a poetical interest, but his place in literary history is due to his many efforts to free himself from the bondage of the eighteenth-century subject. His subjects often have a merely natural, playful, or pathetic appeal, and this humanising of the subject is the more

[1] *Tirocinium.*

notable as it is by no means always accompanied with an equal freedom from the eighteenth-century manner.[1] Cowper often cuts himself free from the eighteenth-century subject, less often from the eighteenth-century style.

Burns also, essentially romantic though his true genius is, betrays traces of the tradition. He is less in bondage to the eighteenth-century style, yet in his younger days is quite as frequently a prey to the eighteenth-century subject. A whole department of his poetry depends for its interest upon political, moral, or social considerations. Burns cut himself largely free from the eighteenth-century style, without freeing himself at all in the same degree from the eighteenth-century subject.

If we wish to see the purely literary emancipation complete—an emancipation, I mean, to which nothing but literary causes had contributed—we must turn to some of the poetry of Scott. The introductions to the several cantos of *Marmion* present us with a poet, though with no political impetus behind him, dealing with natural subjects without the aid of artifice.

Such was the course of poetry. Literary causes working alone produced this result—would in fact, had they been left to work alone, have produced just this result over the whole field of activity. Without the Revolutionary ideas, Glover and Erasmus Darwin would have died, and introductions to *Marmion* and

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[1] See the famous 'Rose,' where the eighteenth-century style is so marked we almost fail to observe that the subject is both slightly pathetic and exceedingly delicate, *e.g.*:

> 'And the tear that is wiped with a little address
> May be follow'd perhaps by a smile.'

The Lay sprouted abundantly ; but without the Revolutionary ideas we should not have had Blake, Wordsworth, Shelley, Byron, the love poetry of Burns, or Scott's chivalric protest.[1] To the French Revolution we do not owe everything in modern poetry, but we do owe its impetus, all that is in it of new fire. Without the French Revolution the eighteenth-century movement in poetry would have died ; without the French Revolution the nineteenth-century movement would not have lived.

The Revolutionary period and the Elizabethan period were alike in this, that they were both times of beginnings ; times in which the world in which man dwells—the world of thought and idea—was recreated for him. In the Elizabethan period his whole world was made anew. The coming of the Revolutionary ideas involved a complete reversal of his attitude to society.

Of Christian Europe's former ideas on this subject the feudal system is the type. That system, which may be represented diagrammatically by a pendent chain, was dominated by the idea of service, of something owed. It was only at the top of the chain that you thought, if you thought at all, of any one as having a right to anything. Each unit owed a duty to the whole of which he formed a component part, a duty variously determined by his particular place therein. Such a society was based equally on the notions of inequality

[1] Scott's revival of chivalric interest, due chiefly, no doubt, to his familiarity with the old Border literature, owed much of its enthusiasm to his dislike of the new Liberal ideas. Mr. Hudson quotes Renan appropriately, 'one belongs to one's century even when one reacts against one's century.'

and of duty. No man was seen as an entity, but only as a part of the larger entity—the rest. The idea underlying the feudal system was pre-eminently social ; and this idea, long surviving its concrete expression in feudal tenures and feudal status, this conception of men as forming a society, a chain, a pyramid, a homogeneous ordered mass, this idea of looking at men as an aggregate, continued till 1789.

Let us place against this conception of society the watchwords of the Revolution—Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity. These words have come to mean almost everything, to express in a vague way the multitudinous and even contradictory[1] ideals of modern democracy, yet in the genesis of Revolutionary idea the first word it is that counts. One begins on the top note. That first word, Liberty, was to be understood in an absolute sense. It is not enough to understand that it stood for freedom from control, individualism ; it meant definitely the right of each man to live his life in his own way—for himself, with a view to his own development, without a view to anybody else's. His right to do so, do I say? no, his duty to do so. Each man has a right, even a duty to himself. The ideal is the individual. One is no longer to look on men as an aggregate, but as a mass of units.

The second word, Equality, if we are to understand the motive force of the Revolution, was essentially little more than a repetition. The individual was the ideal, and each was to have an equal right to live his own life,

[1] If equality is to be understood in a wide general sense, equality of joy or opportunity, it can be preserved only by derogation from the ideal of liberty. Where liberty is absolute, there must be freedom of competition from which inequality will result.

an equal right to freedom. There was to be an equality of liberty. Liberty and Equality means liberty for all.[1] Each man was to be equal before the law, and what was of even more far-reaching effect, to be equally free from the interference of law in matters which concerned him only.

The third word carries its own meaning, but it has also a chorus meaning. All men equally free to develop themselves as men, all individuals equally free from other individuals, were to have no longer any motive for disliking each other. Men were to feel themselves members of one vast family, brothers in freedom.

The truth of this statement is not affected by the loose, extended meaning Equality and Fraternity came to bear, nor even by the fact that this loose, extended meaning was in degree always inherent in them. Equality soon came to mean not only that men were equal before the law, but that they were actually equal, of equal value ; not only that they had equal rights, but that they had a right to equal opportunities, equal joys. It soon came to mean this ; in the minds of many of the Revolutionists it meant this from the first ; perhaps it has always carried some of that meaning even in its sound. Every Pharaoh knows in his heart that men are equal in more things, and in things more important, than the things by which they differ.

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[1] The Puritan consciousness draws the same distinction :—

> ' If not equal all, yet free,
> Equally free ; for orders and degrees
> Jar not with liberty, but well consist.'
>
> *Paradise Lost*, v. 791.

No human being, and certainly no great human movement, can be ignorant of the equal sense of the word Equality. Yet this was not the basic idea of the Revolution. It was not an old human fact the Revolution spoke about, it was a new song it sang.

Man, this was the leading doctrine, was to justify himself not by what he did in the aggregate, and considering himself as an aggregate, but by what he did as a series of differences. Human life was not to be justified by the mechanism, however perfect, of societies, but by the surprising and infinite varieties, however imperfect, of individuals.

The expression of these views is the writings of Rousseau; indeed, the writings of Rousseau are vital, still, for their expression. To Rousseau man appears wonderful, memorable as a unit. His one discovery, his discovery, epoch-making for the whole of Europe, was the recognition of the interest, the meaning, of any single life.

A single human soul coming freshly into contact with the world and man, experiencing for itself, and newly, the whole Universe, its temporary home and surrounding—that is the greatest thing in life. And the experiences of this soul, of the soul as human, when thus brought into contact with whatever is not it, with *all* that is not, are in a literal sense miraculous. How each new peasant born feels the Earth, the starry night, the emotions of his own heart, the wants of his own body ; this perpetual and new interpretation of the same material, the experiences in life of a being ; this is in each case and for itself a miracle as surprising as the sun and moon.

It is a tremendous thing, this full conception of any

one life and what it means.[1] The whole Universe is created anew for each man. There is one Universe, does one say? Not at all. There are as many Universes as human beings. I contain the Universe; in a sense I am the Universe. I am my Universe for me.

Those views were born with Rousseau, and though throughout his career his constant effort is to justify them by argument, and even to reduce them in some sort to a system, they were the cause, not the result of his reasoning. They were his music, and pervaded his consciousness. For all that, this interior faith of his takes shape, and becomes concrete as an opposition doctrine. It stands up, from having something against which to lean. The Roman Empire provided Christianity with its target, and in France, when Rousseau wrote, the evils of the old social system were glaringly apparent. What was at fault? Not the heart of man —no remedial thinker could say that—not the heart of man, for to admit so much was to pronounce the problem insoluble. It was not then the material for society, but *something* in the arrangement of society that was amiss!

But to speak like this is to say nothing; even to think thus judicially is to think out of the company of the makers of our thoughts.

To Rousseau it was not something in the arrangement that was at fault, but the fact of arrangement itself. Society, the social order, is to blame. If only man could be quit of it, ring the knell of artifice, leave the town, seek the country, and resume his natural

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[1] See Wordsworth's Leech-Gatherer, Michael, the Soldier in the *Prelude*, and a hundred other instances in his poems.

independence. All our vices arise from our being constituted in societies. By himself man is innocent, and of nothing more innocent than of original sin.

Rousseau is much too reasonable in his exposition to amuse his readers with a dream of a golden age to come, but his belief or half-belief in its once having existed was, if not an argumentative necessity, at least an argumentative advantage. So it was from the beginning—as soon as a theorist can so convince himself, he feels the solid rock. In the beginning, Rousseau suggests, men were units. In fact we know now that they were not, and that it was ages before the tribal savage rose to the conception of individual entity. Yet Rousseau half-believed in his state of nature, or did not disbelieve in it. The main matter is, he got other people to believe in it, got even the most sensible people, a hundred years before Sir Henry Maine, to believe it might have been.

Men started as units, and being units were good and happy—that was the golden age for them. It was only for purposes of convenience they began to form social connections. There arose out of the family, and from a general recognition of its utility, the tribe, and after the tribe the state. Social order is convenient, even beneficial, to its constituents; but it must always be remembered that it isn't essential, it isn't original, it is no part of the teaching of Nature. What was at first, and therefore most natural, and therefore best, was Liberty.

The aim of Rousseau's politics, then—in Dr. Edward Caird's interpretative words[1]—'the aim of politics was to

[1] *Essays on Literature and Philosophy*, 1892. *Essays on Rousseau and Wordsworth*, a masterly synopsis which has guided all my thinking on Rousseau.

maintain the natural independence of man in spite of the social union.' But there are difficulties. In the first place, men deteriorated by herding together are lazy and assentive; the whole work is done by the front benches. One of the chief anxieties of the general will has become the preservation of the private will. If society had no other reason for existing, it must exist 'to force the individual to be free.' Another difficulty is that a great part of the knowledge man acquires in societies is traditional, and this in itself encourages a tendency to conformity. Before the child has had time to think about the moon, he is told what his fathers believe: that it is a satellite of the earth, or, as sometimes happens, that it is made of green cheese. In either case the child is prevented from discovering the moon for himself, from coming freshly in contact with anything. And so just as there must be a comparatively elaborate social system to counteract the sequacious tendencies of the parents, so there must be an elaborate educational system to allow their children to develop naturally, to escape the fond parental net, and to secure, each for himself, a single existence. The process of education, like the process of government, ought largely 'to be negative.' In any case tradition is unreliable. The Ulemas of any Church add decision to decision till the affronted understanding is started on the voyage of unbelief. Not that the body of traditional Divinity is easily credible. Besides there are many such bodies, and to believe one is to disbelieve the rest. Orthodoxy cannot at one and the same time be Jewish, Christian, and Mohammedan.[1]

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[1] *Émile*, the Savoyard Vicar, *passim*.

Is this to say that just as society cannot tell a child what the world is, because the world is a different thing for each individual, so no Church can tell any man what the Supreme Power is, because the Supreme Power is different with each man? No; this is not Rousseau, the explanation of whose penetrating influence is that he is tied to no system, least of all to a system touched with the scepticism of idealism. He is a revolutionary thinker who never thinks of himself as such. On the subject of religion, if we interrogated him, he would tell us that the heavens must be constant; that here at least there must be absolute truth if only we could find it. How, then, is it to be found? We are to find it, says Rousseau, by finding the interior sentiment of each man, what all men naturally and for themselves have in common in belief; and this basis, really common, a part of the 'common reason,' is a belief in a Supreme Being and a Future State. The savants assail him with a fanfaronnade of questions—what is meant by these terms; is it impossible that the definitions may be so variant as to be exclusive; have a Polynesian and Mr. Jowett really a common meeting-ground; is this resulting substratum of belief a thing that actually exists as a belief; can it be said that Arnold and a priestess of Vesta see the Universe even for a moment in the same way? Rousseau—it gave him his power—would have answered Yes to all these questions. We may answer them as we please. The point is, Rousseau did believe that there was an interior belief; that this interior belief was true, and that you arrived at religious truth, as at everything else, by the testimony of units, by an appeal to the instinct of the individual.

Is this too logical an account of Rousseau's thinking?

Is it not possible, in a few pages, too logically to summarise the thoughts of an episodic and qualificatory thinker, who expresses himself in a romance, a treatise on education, an autobiography, and a dozen occasional pamphlets? Unquestionably; but however too general as an account of Rousseau, it is for that reason the better as an account of Rousseauism, that floating body of startling, logical, and attractive opinion which, consolidated by his works, and detaching itself from them, filled the air which was breathed not only by Western Europe, but by Burns, the young Wordsworth, the young Coleridge, and in a later day Shelley. Genius moves at the bidding of great impulses; revolutions are made by attitudes, not by the careful reading of twenty-seven volumes, and the balancing of their contents. It is often said that Voltaire and Rousseau made the French Revolution, but origins are not quite so precise. It would be more accurate to say it was made by Rousseauism, a movement which, it is true, receives its most equable and beautiful exposition in the works of Rousseau, but which was wider than himself. What made the French Revolution was a conception to which the mind of man was slowly turning—the conception of the Individual Life.

States were now to be judged by the amount of independence they allowed to their citizens. So embracing indeed was the new conception of Liberty that it passed outside the confines of the several states. Coleridge wanted to start a state where no state was. No state was to arrogate the power to interfere with its neighbours. Just as no individual or collection of individuals had a right to coerce any other individual, so no state or collection of states had the right to coerce any other.

If the worship of Individual Liberty is the most striking note of the new poetry, hardly less prominent is the worship of National Liberty, the spirit of Nationalism. Every nation, every collection of men owning a common history and conscious of homogeneity, had an indefeasible right, as long as it did not interfere with others, to live its life in its own way. It might not be a very good way. Poland was not a high example of a civilised state ; yet 'Freedom shrieked when Kosciusko fell.' It might not be a good way, yet on the whole, just as societies arrived at the best results by allowing free play to individual development, so the world arrives at the best results by allowing free play to national developments—

> 'See approach proud Edward's power—
> Edward ! chains and slaverie.'

All this was in the domain of theory. Publicists still dispute as to the respective spheres of the Protagonists in the modern duel of the Man versus the State. Imperial Britain and Imperial Germany call up the sun with their respective crowings, while the world amazed looks on. The small nations produce our only literature, or the oppressed of Russia's evil dream. The world has not yet settled these questions of government, nor ever will. Truth is powerful, but Mammon will prevail.

Yet in these times of which I speak, there seemed no limit to the power of Liberty and Love. How happy to have been born when the whole past seemed slain, and to have moved among those people with shining faces who stood on the edge of a new world. Coleridge, indeed, in his youth hears this music leaving Earth and floating heavenward, sung even by the 'blue

rejoicing sky,' the sky in which, in fact, marches 'the army of unalterable law'; but to see it was the main thing, to believe that the Universe was voting Liberal and had put on the cap of the young Republic.

. . . . .

In the eighteenth century, poets wrote of statesmen, soldiers, courtiers. In the opening of the nineteenth-century movement the poets were interested in human beings—human beings variously employed, but interesting because they were human beings. The human heart and its primary movements and affections, Man and Nature as the one freshly affects and feels the other, these are the subjects which are dealt with by Burns and Wordsworth.

The pure idea of the French Revolution in all its nakedness and ideality is seen most clearly in the poetry of Shelley, but that idea differently interpreted is responsible for the best part of the poetry of Wordsworth and Burns. With Burns our national poetry takes fire again as it took fire in the time of Shakespeare.

Great as are Cowper's occasional triumphs on simple subjects and in a simple style, he is properly to be described as the last of the eighteenth-century poets. He is an eighteenth-century poet with gleams of the nineteenth century in him.

Exactly the reverse can be said of Burns. He is a nineteenth-century poet who betrays traces of the tradition that was then rapidly expiring. And this is markedly true; for while the eighteenth-century work in Cowper does not fall markedly in tone and sentiment below his level—indeed it is his level, his level which occasionally he shoots above—the eighteenth-century work in Burns can be distinguished by the merest novice

in criticism from the real poetry of Burns, so markedly does it lie below the mountain-ranges of his mind.

To speak of this eighteenth-century work before speaking of the real poetry of Burns, of the real Burns.

In the first place, occurring very often in his poetry, chiefly, no doubt, in the English poems—but yet occurring very often, for the English poems are very numerous—there are slips into the artificialism of speech which was the worst part of the eighteenth-century habit.

Occasionally there is a terrifying lapse as when the poet says, recollecting the fate of Mary Stuart,

> 'Tho' something like moisture conglobes in my eye';

and there are references without number to Phœbus, Venus, the Queen of Love, Bacchus, Boreas and the rest, personages in whom Burns did not believe. Nor are these trifles; they bear witness to a habit of mind, the same habit that bears larger fruit in the whole series of unreal pastorals. Burns was no pastoral poet; for the pastoral he had no real feeling; it was as obviously an exercise as it was obviously an unsuccessful exercise for him.

Still more plainly do we find traces of this weakness in Burns's persistent habit of dressing up his thoughts, of his failure to trust them. Take this exclamation from 'Highland Mary,'

> 'But oh! fell Death's untimely frost,
> That nipt my Flower sae early!'

or this from 'Thou Gloomy December,'

> 'Fond lovers' parting is sweet, painful pleasure,
> Hope beaming mild on the soft parting hour;
> But the dire feeling, O farewell for ever!
> Anguish unmingled, and agony pure!'

or this from the 'Farewell to Nancy,'

> 'Deep in heart-wrung tears I'll pledge thee,
> Warring sighs and groans I'll wage thee.
> Who shall say that Fortune grieves him,
> While the star of hope she leaves him?'

or this from 'Mary in Heaven,'

> 'O Mary! dear departed shade!
> Where is thy place of blissful rest?
> See'st thou thy lover lowly laid?
> Hear'st thou the groans that rend his breast?'

or the whole poem which follows. Miss Isabella M'Leod of Raasay had lost her sister and her sister's husband, and Burns thus painted Isabella's woe:—

> 'Raving winds around her blowing,
> Yellow leaves the woodland strowing,
> By a river hoarsely roaring,
> Isabella stray'd deploring:—
>
> "Farewell, hours that late did measure
> Sunshine days of joy and pleasure;
> Hail, thou gloomy night of sorrow,
> Cheerless night that knows no morrow!
>
> O'er the past too fondly wandering,
> On the hopeless future pondering;
> Chilly grief my life-blood freezes,
> Fell despair my fancy seizes.
>
> Life, thou soul of every blessing,
> Load to misery most distressing,
> Gladly how would I resign thee,
> And to dark oblivion join thee!"'

Nor are these instances perversely selected. The last, with its 'load to misery most distressing,' is almost the only poem of Burns about which he was actually conceited. It was once sung in his presence by a lady who knew not the author, and she asked him if he knew

whose were the words. 'Mine, madam—they are indeed my very best verses'; and he goes on: 'She took not the smallest notice of them! I was going to make a New-Testament quotation about "casting pearls," but that would be too virulent, for the lady is actually a woman of sense and taste.'

The most irritating feature of this habit of writing execrably is that it pursues Burns even when he is writing at his best. 'To Mary in Heaven' has lines of merit:—

> 'Time but th' impression stronger makes,
> As streams their channels deeper wear.'

The quotation from the 'Farewell to Nancy' precedes an immortal verse. A poem will open with a snatch of song so penetrating in its depth of passionate feeling, love, anger, grief, that one seems to hear the thud of a blow that has gone home. Here is a picture, a few swift words, of the lover intoxicated with success:—

> 'Yestreen I had a pint o' wine,
> A place where body saw na;
> Yestreen lay on this breast o' mine
> The gowden locks of Anna.'

But after this it goes on:—

> 'The hungry Jew in wilderness,
> Rejoicing o'er his manna,
> Was naething to my hiney bliss
> Upon the lips of Anna.'

And here is another where the anxiety of the lover foreboding doom is completely expressed. The verse is heavy with anxious though hopeless fears:—

> 'Long, long the night,
> Heavy comes the morrow,
> While my soul's delight
> Is on her bed of sorrow.'

But after this it goes on :—

> 'Can I cease to care,
> Can I cease to languish,
> While my darling Fair,
> Is on the couch of anguish !'

What is to be made of such discrepancy? But to say this is not to say all. It is to say that Burns on occasion writes execrably, and so he does. It is to say that he does so most commonly when, not content with the simple expression of a real feeling, he attempts in true eighteenth-century manner to dress up his thoughts.

But when we have thus sifted Burns's bad work from his good and put it behind us, it is still to be said that his good work is not all of a piece. On the contrary, it is of two distinct pieces. It is all good writing, but it is not all poetically good.

There are indeed two sides to the real Burns, the Burns who is in his element, writing with the security of mastery and from his heart. There are two sides to this Burns—the prose side and the poetical side. On the one side his triumphs are in their way as undoubted as his triumphs on the other. But the one series of triumphs would never have entitled him to the name of a poet; the other has established his fame as a poetical writer—*the* poetical writer, may I say? Fortunately here, and the distinction cannot be made with Burns's bad work, the distinction is one of date. Almost all Burns's prose work in verse was finished by the time he was twenty-eight. Almost all his poetry was written in his last ten years.

Of his prose work in verse what it is necessary to say can be said shortly. It is indeed most excellent,

but it is prose work and very definitely so. Its subjects are politics, theology, morals; its manner is terse and sober to a degree: nowhere are the sound sense and masculine judgment of the social human being better in evidence.

The form the verses take is generally that of the admonitory or friendly epistle, the rhyming epistle written to Davie, Lapraik, Simson, or a Young Friend; sometimes, however, they take the form of a theological remonstrance addressed to the strait-laced, and sometimes even that of the political song.

Enclosing the famous lines 'A man 's a man for a' that' to his correspondent, George Thomson, Burns says with admirable truth, 'The following will be allowed, I think, to be two or three pretty good prose thoughts inverted into rhyme.' It is the criticism of the mature poet, it is true; when Burns passed this criticism he was not in the habit of writing prose in verse, but it is a perfectly true criticism, and a perfectly true criticism of nearly half of Burns's total output.

Take this from the 'Epistle to J. Lapraik,'

> 'A set o' dull, conceited hashes
> Confuse their brains in college-classes!
> They gang in stirks, and come out asses';

or this from the 'Epistle to William Simson,'

> 'The muse, nae poet ever fand her,
> Till by himsel he learn'd to wander';

or this from the 'Epistle to a Young Friend,'

> 'A man may hae an honest heart,
> Tho' poortith hourly stare him;
> A man may tak a neibor's part,
> Yet hae nae cash to spare him';

or this,

'I'll no say, men are villains a';
The real, harden'd wicked,
Wha hae nae check but human law,
Are to a few restricket;
But, och! mankind are unco weak,
An' little to be trusted;
If *self* the wavering balance shake,
It's rarely right adjusted!'

or this, as obvious, from the 'Epistle to Davie,'

'It's no in titles nor in rank;
It's no in wealth like Lon'on bank,
To purchase peace and rest;
It's no in makin' muckle, mair;
It's no in books, it's no in lear,
To make us truly blest:
If happiness hae not her seat
An' centre in the breast,
We may be wise, or rich, or great,
But never can be blest;
Nae treasures nor pleasures
Could make us happy lang;
The heart aye's the part aye
That makes us right or wrang';

or this, more daring, from the address to 'Scotch Drink,'

'When neibors anger at a plea,
An' just as wud as wud can be,
How easy can the barley-bree
Cement the quarrel!
Its aye the cheapest lawyer's fee
To taste the barrel.'

Nor must the excellence of the sentiments disguise their character from us. It is an admirable prose admonition, but it is still a prose admonition, when Burns advises the 'Unco Guid':—

'Then gently scan your brother man,
Still gentler sister woman;
Tho' they may gang a kennin wrang,
To step aside is human:

One point must still be greatly dark,
The moving *Why* they do it;
And just as lamely can ye mark,
How far perhaps they rue it.'

Here is even a thought tenderly wise, with the tender wisdom of Gray:—

'The poor inhabitant below
Was quick to learn and wise to know,
And keenly felt the friendly glow,
And softer flame;
But thoughtless follies laid him low,
And stain'd his name!'

And here is a humane sentiment:—

'Many and sharp the num'rous ills
Inwoven with our frame!
More pointed still we make ourselves,
Regret, remorse, and shame!
And man, whose heaven-erected face
The smiles of love adorn,—
Man's inhumanity to man
Makes countless thousands mourn!'

Here is a social poetry deeper in observation than Pope's, richer in humanity than Goldsmith's, more weighty than Johnson's. The fact is, such writing has a ripeness, a grip, a huge tense sense, that makes the best work of the eighteenth century look like child's play.

It may be asked how a writer with the prose side so fully and masculinely developed in him ever became so astonishing a poet. The answer is that the process was gradual.

Among this prose work one finds imbedded work of a totally different order, work of a truly poetical kind. The admirably balanced and sober mind takes fire sporadically; first of all because of the flame within him always at white heat, the 'softer flame'; afterwards

because his admirable good sense itself bubbles to a flame in the rush and hurry of his unapproachable satires ; unapproachable because, while wildly fierce at times, they have always, sometimes even to excess for satire, the sap and juice of his abundant and rich humanity. The Hebraic freedoms, the strokes of Dutch painting do not disguise this, rather they emphasise it. There is an abandon, a zest about Burns at his freest as a satirist, in 'The Jolly Beggars,' 'Holy Willie,' 'The Holy Fair,' that is truly poetical.

Burns, the greatest of Scotch humourists, and a humorist essentially Scotch with all the sly kindness of the race, has indeed left to the Scotch people—to the world too, no doubt, but especially to the Scotch people—a wholly unique collection of humorous poems. I do not say they are all poetical—there are many of them that are essentially prose productions—but they almost all have glints of poetry in them.

They are conceived in so full a vein of humour that it runs over constantly into those bold sallies, those outbursts of unpremeditated feeling, the habit of indulging in which belongs to the poetical mind alone. In Burns's humorous verses, not merely in the satires which everyone knows ; in Burns's humorous narratives like 'Tam o' Shanter' ; in his mock elegies, 'Tam Samson's dead,' 'Poor Mailie's Elegy' ; in his tales of bucolic love, 'Last May a braw wooer cam doun the lang glen,' in these poems as well as in the satires there is, if one cares to look for it, a great deal of poetry. Pathos and humour are so blended and come with such unstudied expression that you have

not only a great humorous writer but a great poetical writer too.

These are, perhaps, the poems for which Burns is most loved in his native country—a country of long-headed prose-writers with a Celtic dash in them. He is loved not so much because he is pre-eminently a poet, though that he is so is the main fact about him, but because in his best-known poems there is displayed the humour and good sense of his countrymen, touched with ecstasy ; poetical rapture fleshified, or rather good solid bone and muscle rising to a spiritual exhilaration. For the poor Lowland Scot in his damp cottage or his hive of modern industry, to read these humorous poems is indeed to taste the rapture of rising irresponsibility. For him it is an intellectual intoxication. His chosen poet, the chosen poet of the Scots, lives constantly among those flashes which come from the soberest after a good dinner, and set the table in a roar. Caution, solidity, prudence, they are there, but they do not bar the door on humour 'in the dawing.'

'There's nought but care on ev'ry han',
In ev'ry hour that passes, O :
What signifies the life o' man,
An' 'twere na for the lasses, O ?

The war'ly race may riches chase,
An' riches still may fly them, O ;
An' tho' at last they catch them fast,
Their hearts can ne'er enjoy them, O.

But gie me a cannie hour at e'en,
My arms about my dearie, O ;
An' war'ly cares and war'ly men,
May a' gae tapsalteerie, O !

For you sae douce, ye sneer at this,
Ye're nought but senseless asses, O :
The wisest man the warl' e'er saw,
He dearly lov'd the lasses, O.

Auld Nature swears, the lovely dears
Her noblest work she classes, O :
Her prentice han' she try'd on man,
An' then she made the lasses, O.
Green grow the rashes, O ;
Green grow the rashes, O ;
The sweetest hours that e'er I spend,
Are spent among the lasses, O.'

There is something in this that sets one thinking of characters more emphasised than those of the South. There is an appreciation of the grey of life in it, a kind of Glasgow sky for a background, and a brave sense of the delights of human kind. There is this, and added to this a sudden breach of decorum, a rising note, as if prudence were finally to be given the good-bye, that is eminently the sad Northerner touched with emotion.

In this class of poems, if in any single class of poems, is to be found the real Burns. But this versatile genius was developing, had, in fact, developed another side of him before he died. There pours forth from him in his last eight years a cataract 'of undying song.' Burns, who, had he died at thirty would have died a national poet, dying at thirty-seven died as the folk-poet of the world.

The songs of the people ! Nowhere in any literature is there to be found so great a folk-poet as Burns. He is sufficiently near to the soil to feel with the perfect simplicity and directness of the true folk-poet.[1] One

[1] And also to be familiar with the oral literature of the soil, the songs of the countryside, of which Burns made as free use as Shakespeare of the plays of the early Elizabethan stage. Like all the greatest original forces Burns was also a product, and many of his songs were more than a hundred years in the making.

can trace this quality, perhaps the rarest of all poetical qualities, as prominent in him quite early. When he is twenty-two he thus celebrates a rustic mistress :—

'Yestreen, when to the trembling string
The dance gaed thro' the lighted ha',
To thee my fancy took its wing,
I sat, but neither heard nor saw :
Tho' this was fair and that was braw
And yon the toast of a' the town,
I sigh'd, and said amang them a',
"Ye are na Mary Morison."'

'A poor fiddler at a village practising on the sanded floor of some school-room,' and the buxom lassie who is going out to service polkaing up and down the floor. It is tremendous, and reminds one of nothing so much as of the cry of Leontes when at last he understands that the seeming statue is Hermione, and alive :—

'Oh, she's warm.'[1]

Or take this, with its picture of the boon companion sitting in the candle-blaze till the night is late :—

'As I cam by Crochallan,
I cannilie keeket ben ;
Rattlin', roarin' Willie
Was sittin' at yon boord-en' ;

Sittin' at yon boord-en',
And amang gude companie ;
Rattlin', roarin' Willie,
You're welcome hame to me !'

[1] For this comparison I am indebted to the conversation of the author of 'Tannhäuser' and 'Merlin,' the late Mr. Macleod Fullarton, Q.C., who was responsible (*Lallan Songs and German Lyrics*) for some of our best translations from Heine.

There is an unmatchable freedom in the lollop of the verses, freer than the canter of the sleekest mare :—

'My love, she's but a lassie yet,
My love, she's but a lassie yet;
We'll let her stand a year or twa,
She'll no be hauf sae saucy yet.'

In comin' by the brig o' Dye,
At Darlet we a blink did tarry;
As day was dawin in the sky,
We drank a health to bonie Mary.
Theniel Menzies' bonie Mary,
Theniel Menzies' bonie Mary,
Charlie Grigor tint his plaidie,
Kissin' Theniel's bonie Mary.'

Will ye go to the Hielands, Leezie Lindsay,
Will ye go to the Hielands wi' me?
Will ye go to the Hielands, Leezie Lindsay,
My pride and my darling to be.'

'It's up yon heathery mountain,
And down yon scroggy glen,
We daurna gang a-milking,
For Charlie and his men!'

'Mally's meek, Mally's sweet,
Mally's modest and discreet;
Mally's rare, Mally's fair,
Mally's ev'ry way complete.'

Occasionally in Shelley's songs there is a strain of unearthly music, a faint air coming from aloft, getting itself sung by harps celestial and to melodies not ours. Burns's command of verse, in its own way, is as wonderful: it is like a human being, but it is like a human being in tune, so fresh, so easy; the natural song of the earth and its toilers; like running water.

However, it is the *sentiment* of Burns's songs that has caught the ear of the world. There is the same fluent music, only there has entered into it the music of

humanity, its passion, its grief, its strange come-from-nowhere melancholy, the eerie feeling we have sometimes while living, because all of us by the same road are compelled to go.

Sometimes we have the sentiment in its lightest form where the tone has not begun to deepen and where the humour is still alive; sometimes we have it with just a suspicion of the sense of loss:—

'Bonie wee thing, cannie wee thing,
Lovely wee thing, wert thou mine,
I wad wear thee in my bosom,
Lest my jewel it should tine.'

Or again, with a most delicious open melancholy:—

'Out over the Forth, I look to the north;
But what is the north and its Highlands to me?
The south nor the east gie ease to my breast,
The far foreign land, or the wide rolling sea.

But I look to the west when I gae to rest,
That happy my dreams and my slumbers may be;
For far in the west lives he I loe best,
The man that is dear to my babie and me.'

Or more poignantly:—

'My heart is sair—I dare na tell,
My heart is sair for Somebody;
I could wake a winter night[1]
For the sake o' Somebody.'

More poignantly still:—

'O wert thou in the cauld blast,
On yonder lea, on yonder lea,
My plaidie to the angry airt,
I'd shelter thee, I'd shelter thee.'

[1] The last two lines are at least as old as Ramsay's *Tea Table Miscellany*, but they are not part of a poignant song.

Or where the melancholy is creeping into the tale of love :—

'O wat ye wha 's in yon town,
Ye see the e'enin' sun upon,
The dearest maid 's in yon town,
That e'enin' sun is shining on';

or touched with the tear of parting :—

'I 'll aye ca' in by yon town,
And by yon garden-green again ;
I 'll aye ca' in by yon town,
And see my bonie Jean again.'

On this theme, indeed, recollection, reminiscence, parting, Burns has written for all time, from

'We twa hae paidl'd in the burn,'

of the Scotch good-night, to the bold simplicity of 'John Anderson' and the beautiful lines which he added to the old quatrain :—

'Go, fetch to me a pint o' wine,
And fill it in a silver tassie ;
That I may drink before I go,
A service to my bonie lassie';

the four beautiful lines full of the smell of the sea :—

'The boat rocks at the pier o' Leith ;
Fu' loud the wind blaws frae the Ferry ;
The ship rides by the Berwick-law,
And I maun leave my bonie Mary.'

There is a mingling of the sadness which comes with time and a rapturous confession of the joys of the past in this most famous piece :—

'How long and dreary is the night,
When I am frae my dearie !
I sleepless lye frae e'en to morn,
Tho' I were ne'er so weary :

When I think on the happy days
I spent wi' you my dearie :
And now what lands between us lie,
How can I be but eerie !

How slow ye move, ye heavy hours,
As ye were wae and weary !
It was na sae ye glinted by,
When I was wi' my dearie ! '

The sudden return of the mind upon its distant joy, and the triumph of that ungrammatical 'It was not *so* ye *glinted* by,' might perhaps stand as the triumphant instance of the lightning effects of poetry.

Yet sudden transitions from one mood to another are not common with Burns. He looses himself on a single note, seizing with poetical insistence on the poetical heart of the matter. When Byron thinks of a battlefield he thinks effectively, thinks of these

'Rider and horse,—friend, foe,—in one red burial blent.'

When Burns thinks of it, he thinks only of natural loss. There was much to say of Culloden or Drumossie moor, but the poet has this only to say :—

'The lovely lass o' Inverness,
Nae joy nor pleasure can she see ;
For, e'en to morn she cries "alas ! "
And ay the saut tear blin's her e'e.

"Drumossie moor, Drumossie day—
A waefu' day it was to me !
For there I lost my father dear,
My father dear, and brethren three."'

It seizes upon the truth with a deadly insistence :—

'When wild war's deadly blast was blawn
And gentle peace returning,
Wi' mony a sweet babe fatherless,
And mony a widow mourning.'

Yes, that is about it; there is perhaps not much more to say about wild war than that. The chivalry of it, its nobility, its lost causes, Burns feels on occasion, but he feels them as a Scotch patriot or Jacobite—not normally, that is, but only when the most sentimental part of Scotch history has displaced his natural sentiment; and even here he is true to the purely human sorrow when the occasion is sorrowful:—

'It was a' for our rightfu' King
We left fair Scotland's strand;
It was a' for our rightfu' King
We e'er saw Irish land, my dear,
We e'er saw Irish land.

Now a' is done that men can do,
And a' is done in vain;
My Love and Native Land fareweel,
For I maun cross the main, my dear,
For I maun cross the main.

He turn'd him right and round about,[1]
Upon the Irish shore;
And gae his bridle reins a shake,
With adieu for evermore, my dear.
And adieu for evermore.

The soger frae the wars returns,
The sailor frae the main;
But I hae parted frae my love,
Never to meet again, my dear,
Never to meet again.'

The reality deepens at the close. After all, it is what counts. I am sorry for the Russian people, but I should not think of Russia if my own sorrows struck

[1] The third verse is old, and was borrowed both by Burns and Scott ('A weary lot is thine, fair maid'—*Rokeby*, Canto IV.), but whereas in Scott's lyric it beats the rest, Burns immediately beats it by sheer strength of human sympathy. Scott decorates his original charmingly with flowers. Burns uses it as a stone in his building.

home. No grief has the depth of a private grief, and Burns, of all poets, knows these primary facts about human nature best, knows them and lives with them. From this farmer, peasant, yeoman and exciseman, there is little to disguise the realities of life. About grief and love he has the last word, for he feels both simply.

For the lady of high degree, it may not be the pure flame of love alone that animates the breast; the lover may wish to possess what other men desire, to possess from a feeling akin to envy. Admiration, a desire for a stimulating companionship, these may mingle with elemental affection. It is different with Mary, Jean, or Peggy, the soft female thing with whom his whole being is at rest, lulled to a sleep of contentment in a companionship that can get no words for it, just the companionship of mating. And this strange universal human feeling, what the peasant feels for the peasant lass, the unspoken sympathy of the woman as woman, has never before or since been voiced so simply—so simply that you begin to understand why the first man yearned for his Eve, untutored, undecorated, unloquacious Eve. It is the male speaking; the bird, beast, or man sharing a rapture common to the earth. The whole creation groaneth; yes, but it pulsates too:—

'My Luve is like a red, red rose,
That 's newly sprung in June:
My Luve is like the melodie,
That 's sweetly play'd in tune.

As fair art thou, my bonie lass,
So deep in luve am I;
And I will luve thee still, my Dear,
Till a' the seas gang dry.

Till a' the seas gang dry, my Dear,
And the rocks melt wi' the sun;
And I will luve thee still, my Dear,
While the sands o' life shall run.

And fare-thee-weel, my only Luve!
And fare-thee-weel, a while!
And I will come again, my Luve,
Tho' 'twere ten thousand mile!'[1]

Nothing is said; no, nothing is said, for there is nothing to say. It is a felt companionship—a felt companionship which the Browning of 'Two in the Campagna' and the Shelley of the 'Lines written in the Bay of Naples' will miss and must miss. Perhaps a man of culture or convention must always, in some degree, miss it, and that is why our cultivated poets write so little love poetry that is purely of the heart; write, instead, love poetry that is ideal, or affected, or romantic; why Milton and even Shakespeare are rather poor hands at it, and why Arnold evidently thinks this immortal love poetry, perhaps the only true love poetry in the world, for Sappho speaks of passion, of light account. There is seldom anything light or vulgar in it, though equally there is nothing of cultivation. It is true, a stream so unending runs to shallows, chatters sometimes when one does not hear. But always it is grandly common, untroubled, fondness in its elements and without gêne. To the cultivated poet domestic love affords little opening for poignant

[1] This masterpiece is all made up of snatches from various old songs, and the twelfth line is the only one of which no rude original is known; but the snatches taken separately have no remarkable effect. How different when a singleness of feeling welds them together! There is no more striking instance in literature of the 'Ring' and the 'Book.'

themes, and yet with it absent from his love-story there is, for him, immediately, an impropriety of which, whether as attracting or repelling, there is no thought in the movements of affection.[1] Burns does not think about such things. The old peasant-courtship of the country-side supplied him subjects at once actual and ideal. One sees the field for the display of feeling, and over what experiences a poetry at once so jocular and so tender, so outspoken and so intimate, might freely range. Soiled with self his actual feelings were, but how single they become when realised in their merely human reference by so natural an imagination. He speaks constantly of the lived occasion ; from the passing charms which he fits to some world air, to the grief or ecstasy which, generalised in the poetic consciousness, brings from him the words of life. Indeed, these last emotions are sometimes mingled, and one can see, at one moment, the truant husband-lover and the sick sorrow he has brought to the friendly door ; the sick sorrow and the sick longing, the sick longing and the happy longing, the triumph in the lover's good air. The verses which we may suppose to be spoken by his Jean are irresistibly affecting, not the less that all is subdued by a prevailing melancholy as if the poet for once had felt the oppression of the real :—

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[1] It must be admitted that Arnold's own poetry affords an instance of a love poetry that is at once cultivated and genuine. He writes very little of it, but what he does write is beautifully true. Cf. his treatment of the Tristram and Iseult theme with Tennyson's or Swinburne's. It is curious that Swinburne also in his first sketch introductory to this subject (*Undergraduate Papers*) starts very genuinely.

'O how can I be blythe and glad,
Or how can I gang brisk and braw,
When the bonie lad that I lo'e bes
Is o'er the hills and far awa!

My father pat me frae his door,
My friends they hae disown'd me a
But I hae ane will tak my part,
The bonie lad that's far awa.

A pair o' glooves he bought to me
And silken snoods he gae me twa
And I will wear them for his sake,
The bonie lad that's far awa.

O weary Winter soon will pass,
And Spring will cleed the birken shaw
And my young babie will be born,
And he'll be hame that's far awa.'

There is no poetry like this. I do not say that there is not greater poetry, but there is no poetry so free from any thought of man's arrangements, so immediately concerned with the feeling itself. A human feeling—that is what interests Burns, and it is in the expression of these simple, human feelings that he is unmatched. A human feeling, because he was above all things himself human, and spent nobly, generously, foolishly, commonly, in common joys his blood and tears. A stumble in the snow when he had left his cronies in the bar-parlour at Dumfries, a short but heavy sleep, and good-bye, after a year's weary fighting, to the sun,—'Let him shine, my dear; he will not shine much longer for me,'—good-bye to the sun and to humanity.

'A foolish life and worse, perhaps.' No, the moral is too trite; just the life of the human body as experienced by the human soul—the soul sitting within

its clay castle and recording it so that we who read may profit. To what purpose? I have often asked myself as I have read the lives and heard the cries of poets—to no other purpose but that man may know more of man.

WORDSWORTH

WORDSWORTH, like Burns, was a child of Revolutionary idea. Like Burns, also, the whole shape of his mind was affected by the influence of writings breathing a romantic or anti-classical or anti-formal spirit. He had, of course, neither the same free access as Burns to the love-song of the country-side, nor Scott's long schooling at one of the fountain-heads of ballad literature. But Burns had written his own songs before Wordsworth was at his zenith, and, by 1800, Philips and Percy—if it was Philips who was responsible for the 1723 Collection of Old Ballads—were old names. What is worth remark in the prefaces of both books is the consciousness of the writers that they were innovating. The editor of the Collection of Old Ballads had largely the interest of the mere curio-hunter, but we see[1] in his

[1] 'If there be any Beauties in the Book, 'tis certainly his (the reader's) Business to find them out; and if there ben't—why, he can't say I cheated him: I never pretended to give him anything more than an old Song. . . . I would not be thought to ridicule anything in Sacred Writ, and therefore I will pass over in Silence, what I might say of the Times of Moses, Jephthah and David, and go directly amongst the Pagans. And here the very Prince of Poets, old Homer, if we may trust ancient Records, was nothing more than a blind Ballad-singer. . . . It would be endless, to prove that the several Poets whose Bustos I have put in my Frontispiece, were Ballad-writers. For what else can we make of Pindar's Lyrics? Anacreon would never sit down contented without his Bottle and his Song. Horace could drop the Praises of Augustus and

apologetic and absurd preface how glad he was of the shield of antiquarianism. Percy apologises too. 'As most of these ballads are of great simplicity, and seem to have been merely written for the people, the Editor was long in doubt, whether, in the present state of improved literature, they could be deemed worthy of the attention of the public.' Johnson had given his sanction to the publication, his incapacity for feeling poetry blinding him to its importance, but his massively acute intellect was quick to take alarm at its success. How good a critic he was,[1] within

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Maecenas, to sing the Adventures of his Journey to Brundusium and the Baulk he met with from a Servant Wench in a Country Alehouse ; and this Song of his it was, which gave Occasion to a modern Ballad amongst us, called, The Coy Cook-maid. Cowley has left too many Works of this Kind to need quoting ; and Suckling's Wedding will never be forgot.'

[1] 'When Dr. Percy first published his collection of ancient English ballads, perhaps he was too lavish in commendation of the beautiful simplicity and poetic merit he supposed himself to discover in them. This circumstance provoked Johnson to observe one evening at Miss Reynolds's tea-table, that he could rhyme as well, and as elegantly, in common narrative and conversation. "For instance," says he,—

"As with my hat upon my head
I walk'd along the Strand,
I there did meet another man
With his hat in his hand."

Or, to render such poetry subservient to my own immediate use,—

"I therefore pray thee, Renny dear,
That thou wilt give to me,
With cream and sugar soften'd well,
Another dish of tea.

Nor fear that I, my gentle maid,
Shall long detain the cup,
When once unto the bottom I
Have drunk the liquor up.

his limits, may be gauged by his uneasy ridicule. He saw the danger to the existing school of poetry, and was the boldest in crying 'Fire.'

The truth is, the eighteenth-century movement in poetry was mortally wounded by Percy's publication. In his volumes, despite their odd jumble of contents and his own persevering joinering work, men came in contact with a directness of narrative and a simplicity of effect which made the efforts of a cultivated literature look extremely laboured. At times in these ballads everything is accomplished by the mere telling of the fact:—

'With that ther cam an arrowe hastely
Forthe off a mightie wane,
Hit hathe strekene the yerle Duglas
In at the brest bane.

Thoroue lyvar and longs bathe
The sharp arrowe ys gane,
That never after in all his lyffe days
He spayke mo wordes but ane.'

It has the sound of ending in it.

Sometimes, equally successfully, the sentiment of an occasion is fully brought out by the realisation of the event; no comment is necessary:—

'So on the morrowe the mayde them byears
Off byrch, and hasell so "gray";
Many wedous with wepying tears,
Cam to fach ther makys a-way.'

Yet hear, alas! this mournful truth,
Nor hear it with a frown;—
Thou canst not make the tea so fast
As I can gulp it down."

And thus he proceeded through several more stanzas, till the reverend critic cried out for quarter. Such ridicule, however, was unmerited.'

George Steevens, the Editor of Shakespeare, wrote this in 1785.

In the typical romantic ballad 'Edom o' Gordon,' a serving-man of the lady, round whose castle burning wood is set, turns traitor to her :—

'And ein wae worth ye, Jock my man,
I paid ye weil your hire ;
Quhy pow ye out the ground-wa stane,
To me lets in the fire ?

Ye paid me weil my hire, lady ;
Ye paid me weil my fee :
But now Ime Edom o' Gordon's man,
Maun either doe or die.'

There is no better instance even in Wordsworth of the uncovering of the breast. The callous, low nature has been bought, and he runs no danger in saying so to his doomed lady.

The sincerity of those nameless writers is as great as their feeling for the picturesque. In the story of Sir Gawaine's marriage we have this expression :—

'I am glad as grasse wold be of raine,'

and a little earlier the picture :—

'He said as I came over a more
I see a lady where shee sate
Betweene an oke and a green hollen
Shee was clad in red scarlette.'[1]

It is difficult to characterise the pathos of some of those pieces, so unobtrusive is it, like that felt throughout 'Young Waters,' or, as often (as at the end of 'O Waly, Waly,' for instance), in the mere statement.

There it misses the intensity of Burns, not on account

[1] There is the whole of forest greenery in this childish verse.

'The roo full rekeles ther sche rinnes,
To make the game and glee :
The fawcon and the fesaunt both,
Amonge the holtes on hee.'

Battle of Otterbourne.

of any defect of truth in the pathos, but just because the pathos is more unobtrusive. The heart that beats there is not a mighty heart transmuting sorrow into passion ; rather that of one content feelingly to observe the sorrows of the world.

In Percy's collection there are few of those strokes of driving power which occasionally distinguished the Scotch balladists. There is the familiar passage in 'Edom o' Gordon' where the vivid colours of young girlhood are contrasted with a violent death ;[1] there is the simply stated tragedy in 'Edward, Edward,' and in 'The Jew's Daughter' the voice of the poet clangs through :—

> 'The lead is wondrous heavy, mither,
> The well is wondrous deip.'

But in the main the collection is not rich in instances of native force. What it chiefly made clear to the poetical genius of the country was the value of the stated fact. To see this we have only to contrast these volumes with such a poem as Hamilton's 'Braes of Yarrow' with its studied wistful pathos and its lovely dragging length ; an effect produced by the happiest management of the artifice of iteration.

The great poetic outburst round about the year 1800

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[1] 'O bonnie bonnie was hir mouth,
And cherry were hir cheiks,
And clear clear was hir yellow hair,
Whareon the reid bluid dreips.'

Longfellow makes use of the same motif—

'Blue were her eyes as the fairy-flax,
Her cheeks like the dawn of day,
And her bosom white as the hawthorn buds
That ope in the month of May.'

It is the weakness of Longfellow, as it is also his strength, that he is always happiest on the most familiar themes.

(1785-1815) had then two causes. It was caused, in part, by what we call the Romantic Revival; that is the literary explanation, and in part by the French Revolution; that is the political explanation. But Mr. Watts Dunton believes both those causes to be causes only immediate. The real determining cause, he says, 'was nothing less than a great revived movement of the soul of man after a long period of prosaic acceptance in all things, including literature and art.' To this revival Mr. Watts Dunton gives the name 'Renascence of Wonder.' 'The phrase,' he adds, 'indicates that there are two great impulses governing man,' one at one period of the world's history, the other at another, 'the impulse of acceptance—the impulse to take unchallenged and for granted all the phenomena of the outer world as they are—and the impulse to confront these phenomena with eyes of inquiry and wonder.' 'Anthropologists have often asked,' he says, 'what was that lever-power lying enfolded in the dark womb of some remote semi-human brain which by first stirring, lifting, and vitalising other potential and latent faculties, gave birth to man? Would it be rash to assume that this lever-power was a vigorous movement of the faculty of wonder?' 'There are of course,' he goes on, 'different kinds of wonder. Primitive poetry is full of wonder—the naïve and eager wonder of the healthy child. It is the kind of wonder which makes the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* so delightful. The wonder of primitive poetry passes as the primitive conditions of civilisation pass. And then for the most part it can only be succeeded by a very different kind of wonder—the wonder aroused by a recognition of the mystery of man's life and the mystery of Nature's

theatre on which the human drama is played—the wonder, in short, of Æschylus and Sophocles.'

There is a familiar passage in *Biographia Literaria* which, allowing for the fact that Coleridge is there dealing with definite intentions, is in tone and sentiment very like this. He is speaking of the course of thought which resulted in the publication of *The Lyrical Ballads* :—

'The thought suggested itself . . . that a series of poems might be composed of two sorts. In the one, the incidents and agents were to be, in part at least, supernatural ; and the excellence aimed at was to consist in the interesting of the affections by the dramatic truth of such emotions as would naturally accompany such situations, supposing them real. And real in this sense they have been to every human being, who from whatever source of delusion, has at any time believed himself under supernatural agency. For the second class, subjects were to be chosen from ordinary life ; the characters and incidents were to be such as will be found in every village and its vicinity, where there is a meditative and feeling mind to seek after them, or to notice them, when they present themselves.

'In this idea, originated the plan of the *Lyrical Ballads* ; in which it was agreed that my endeavours should be directed to persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic ; yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a resemblance of truth sufficient to procure for those shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith. Mr. Wordsworth, on the other hand, was to propose

to himself as his object, to give the charm of novelty to things of every day, and to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural, by awakening the mind's attention to the lethargy of custom, and directing it to the loveliness and wonders of the world before us; an inexhaustible treasure, but for which, in consequence of the film of familiarity and selfish solicitude, we have eyes, yet see not, ears that hear not, and hearts that neither feel nor understand.'

. . . . .

Wordsworth was to give the charm of novelty to things of every day, but for Wordsworth this was not difficult, for he saw the world newly. He had a native instinct for reality; his lonely childhood had made his sensations real to him; his chief companions shepherds, 'statesmen' of the dales, had, for background to their every emotion, mountain and sky. At times to him, travelling on the hills, the bleat of a sheep and the surrounding universe were the two opposites that made the all. During his residence in France he took from the air that wandering current of Rousseauism which was a reinforcement of his thoughts. That unenervated country life, the ways of peasants providing for their food, the individual values which Rousseau celebrated, of these he was already fond. But besides this, in himself he was familiar with ecstasies. Writing of him in 1792, his sister speaks of 'a sort of violence of affection, if I may so term it, which demonstrates itself every moment of the day.' The sensations that came to him were not those that are usually associated with his name; on the contrary, such as could have been felt even by the Wordsworth who is supposed to have existed. He was a being to

whom occurrence spoke, so constituted as, of course, to suffer, but also to experience

> 'That pleasurable feeling of blind love,
> The pleasure which there is in life itself.'

This combination of aptitudes produced a poetry which is a unique gift to the English world. There is no other which so well explains the nature of poetry, which, without leaning in the least to the side of poetising, is so essentially poetical. He has written a great deal in verse, more than lesser men, that is not poetry; he was not careful in his long poems to raise the something which is not poetry to the level of the something which, though not poetry, is not prose; in his late years he amused himself with a number of exercises in which he was too careful to preserve this level and was too satisfied with it. Sometimes too, in his best period, though rarely, his anxiety to express the fact led him to express a prose fact; all this is obvious and is the common vision of the blind. But his entire merit is a poetical merit: at his best, and constantly, his poetry is so purely poetry, it has so little an admixture of the particularising intelligence, that to some quick intellects it seems literally to miss fire. The glass seems empty because there is nothing but pure water in the glass.

An experience from the outside world comes to Wordsworth, and he puts you in possession of the impression that experience made *when it came*. Language is used, you would have said, but for your experience of these poems, to bring you nearer to the emotion than language can. The purr of a kitten, the laugh of a child, the long indrawn breath of the bereaved, how easy to understand; and yet, because

Wordsworth is using the same vehicle with which we commonly, though unintentionally—because we cannot do otherwise—disguise our thoughts, we do not realise what he is doing. It took æons to form a language; it took Wordsworth to unform one, to teach language to unroll. The art of speech fades away like a thin vapour and the heart is known.

Once, being near Derby, Wordsworth, to give Professor Raleigh's instance, had occasion to travel the same road going and returning, and it happened to him, in the morning, to observe a company of gipsies resting by the roadside on the heath. 'The poet, after a day of crowded and changeful experience under the open sky, returns to find the group of gipsies sitting as before round their camp-fire. The winds are blowing and the clouds moving, so that the little knot of human beings seems the only stationary thing in Nature.' They typify 'the dormancy of mere indolence' in a Universe where nothing is still. You cannot bathe twice in the same river, nor can the same man bathe twice. He who says so is a different being when he writes the next sentence. Perpetually sloughing and renewing, the body is a true analogue of Universal law. If the heart stops beating for a minute it enters on a new process of change, and even the thing we call dead speeds along the road of decay. The law of life and activity is the only law, and Nature is, because she is always becoming.

This is explication, the intellect having started reasoning along a line of thought suggested by an opposition. But to the poet, the inactivity of these vagrants opens wide a mere apprehending :—

> 'The silent Heavens have goings-on ;
> The stars have tasks—but these have none.'

His sense of this has had hardly time to form itself into speech, so near is 'going on' to the reality of the apprehension, so much nearer than any words such as movement or process which pre-suppose or connote a conception. The mind is flooded with a feeling of the unconscious life of Nature, and the thing is said as it is felt.[1]

This which Wordsworth does for himself here he

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[1] Professor Raleigh's discussion of this poem (*Wordsworth*, Edward Arnold, 1903) occurs in a chapter on Poetic Diction, but his words are not sufficiently directed to my immediate purpose to allow me to use all of them instead of my own: 'Some of these alterations have happily disappeared from the definitive edition; others remain. Thus the poem on *Gipsies* originally ended with these two lines:—

> "The silent Heavens have goings-on;
> The stars have tasks—but these have none."

'To some mind or other the word "goings-on" suggested flippant associations, and the lines were altered thus:—

> "Life which the very stars reprove
> As on their silent tasks they move!"

Not only is the most telling word suppressed; there is a more fundamental change, typical of many changes made by Wordsworth when he had lost touch with his original impressions. The bare contrast of the earlier poem is moralised. The strangeness of the simple impression is lost for the sake of a most impotent didactic application. The poet, after a day of crowded and changeful experience under the open sky, returns to find the group of gypsies sitting as before round their camp-fire. The winds are blowing and the clouds moving, so that the little knot of human beings seems the only stationary thing in nature. The restless joy of the poet, his fellow-feeling with the mighty activities of Nature, breaks out in a single remonstrance:—

> "Oh better wrong and strife,
> Better vain deeds and evil than such life!"

Even this he changed when his sensibilities had been crusted over and his appetite for explicit moral teaching increased by the passage of years' (pp. 98, 99).

can do for other people; or rather, because the people of whom he speaks are merely human, he continues to do this for himself while supposing himself in a variety of situations. For example, imagining the little country girl shut up in the network of poor streets which in 1797 made the City, he writes this :—

'At the corner of Wood Street, when daylight appears,
Hangs a Thrush that sings loud, it has sung for three years;
Poor Susan has passed by the spot, and has heard
In the silence of morning the song of the Bird.

'Tis a note of enchantment; what ails her? She sees
A mountain ascending, a vision of trees;
Bright volumes of vapour through Lothbury glide,
And a river flows on through the vale of Cheapside.

Green pastures she views in the midst of the dale,
Down which she so often has tripped with her pail;
And a single small cottage, a nest like a dove's,
The one only dwelling on earth that she loves.

She looks, and her heart is in heaven: but they fade,
The mist and the river, the hill and the shade:
The stream will not flow, and the hill will not rise,
And the colours have all passed away from her eyes.'

The opening of this little poem might be used as an instance of what is meant by visualisation :—

'Bright volumes of vapour through Lothbury glide,
And a river flows on through the vale of Cheapside.'

'*Seems*, madam! nay, it is; I know not *seems*.' The dream is superimposed upon the reality. Equally close to the more delicate emotional experience is the description of the fading vision :—

'The stream will not flow, and the hill will not rise.'

In one's bed in the morning, half roused from a dream and trying with a sleepy persistence to recapture the

images that, lately distinct, still so cloud the faculties as to make them impervious to waking, who has not felt his whole mind surrendered to the realisation of just this inability?

With the next line the bare day is with us. One has been sitting in the concert hall listening to St. Cecilia's harmony. It ceases, and the instruments are still. One is conscious of a visual blank, not of anything happening but of something having ceased to happen, of colours that have gone out, and that is the extent of one's consciousness. If it be said that other people besides Wordsworth could have written the last line of the poem, it must be answered they would have written more.

Similarly in the poem describing the lover's visit to Lucy's cottage, Wordsworth is content with the bare statement of what occurred.[1] To be near the beloved is an important occasion, and the rider's heart is tense; and just as Charcot's patient kept his eye fixed on the scintillating ring on the hypnotist's finger, so Wordsworth keeps his on the one bright spot in the sky—the evening moon. The concentration of the mind upon one thought allows the eye to concentrate itself upon one thing, indeed makes it easily a victim to the hypnotic point. Lucy's cottage is situated on a hill,

[1] And so the Edinburgh Reviewer in 1801 : 'Love and the fantasies of lovers have afforded an ample theme to poets of all ages. Mr. Wordsworth, however, has thought fit to compose a piece, illustrating this subject by one single thought. A lover trots away to see his mistress one fine evening, staring all the way at the moon; when he gets to her door—

"O mercy! to myself I cried
If Lucy should be dead."

And there the poem ends.' An unintentionally good criticism.

and, as the horse climbs the slope, the moon appears to be dropping behind the small building that, to the rider looking upward, is the highest thing against the horizon. There comes a moment when the cottage comes directly in the line of sight, and the object of the physical eyes falls out of vision. The mind is conscious of a sense of loss, and in this sense of loss is involved the one subject of Wordsworth's thought.

How flat all this is, and how the dissection of an emotional state destroys its power of contagion! Had Wordsworth written so, he would have made himself plain certainly, but would have wakened no responsive echo. In his little miracle which, for want of a better word, we call a poem, the fond and wayward thought slides into us as it came to the lover, and we experience the same unearthly thrill. Wordsworth gives us the whole conscious experience; what he does not give us is the operation of the mind upon that experience after it has ceased.[1]

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[1] By this it is, of course, not meant that Wordsworth's poetry is spontaneous, or that he expresses the emotion immediately he has felt it. What actually happens is that he ponders over the experience till he is able to get back to it, and to express it just as it came. His own definition of poetry, 'emotion recollected in tranquillity,' accurately describes his manner of work. He has to have time to realise what he felt. What he does, as the result of much meditation, is to recapture an emotional effect.

It is interesting to remember that Tennyson in *Maud* has imitated the *sinking* feeling in this 'Moon' poem, but he is much farther from the emotion :—

'But I look'd, and round, all round the house I beheld
The death-white curtain drawn;
Felt a horror over me creep,
Prickle my skin and catch my breath,
Knew that the death-white curtain meant but sleep,
Yet I shudder'd and thought like a fool of the sleep of death.'

Perhaps the simplest instance is in 'The Two April Mornings.' Matthew, the old schoolmaster, is speaking of the first, now thirty years ago :—

'Six feet in earth my Emma lay;
And yet I loved her more,
For so it seemed, than till that day
I e'er had loved before.

And, turning from her grave, I met,
Beside the churchyard yew,
A blooming Girl, whose hair was wet
With points of morning dew.

A basket on her head she bare;
Her brow was smooth and white:
To see a child so very fair,
It was a pure delight!

No fountain from its rocky cave
E'er tripped with foot so free;
She seemed as happy as a wave
That dances on the sea.

There came from me a sigh of pain
Which I could ill confine;
I looked at her, and looked again:
And did not wish her mine!'

While the physical impression is very distinct, the feeling is expressed by a sigh and a negation. We know, of course, Matthew's reason. One's own offspring, in whom courses the blood that warms one's heart, is *sui generis*: one can be reminded of a dead beloved, but, as it is said in France, one can have but one mother. But a course of reasoning so simple could hardly be fully absent from any mind? The

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Tennyson was the most perfect of imitators. Echoes of Virgil, Theocritus, Shakespeare, add no discrepant beauty to the beauty which is his own. Yet when even Tennyson tries to imitate Wordsworth, one remembers Professor Murray's quotation, 'it does somehow sound like twitterings.'

truth is that the feeling lies behind even this simple effort. Matthew is conscious only of an absence of desire; his fancy for the beautiful little maiden, so like Emma, does not reach to a forgetfulness of his loss.

In Wordsworth's poems we get near the first movements of the heart, and we may truly say that in them we deal with the elements of poetry. This merit alone would have made him the most poetical of poets, but it would not have made him Wordsworth. Alongside of his power of uncovering the breast, his power of passively recording the impression, there is an active faculty—the faculty of sudden vision. That is to say, there is not only the thing which comes directly against the sight, but what else the thing seen makes him glance aside to see; not only what is felt, but the responsive activities of feeling.

This faculty is perhaps not as frequently employed. Certainly it is not always to be found in conjunction with the other; yet it is often so found. In the poem which Wordsworth wrote on the daffodils, he describes himself as wandering alone, purposelessly, the intellectual energy held in suspension as a cloud may hold its rain, when his eyes are filled with the sight of a myriad daffodils waving, down there beside the lake, the miracle of a flower. In a moment he is awake, and the whole miraculous life of Nature is comprehended in a flash. His mind jumps from the brilliant weeds at his feet to the unnumbered worlds with which is sown the vault of heaven. Miracle answers to miracle, and the far explains the near:—

> 'Continuous as the stars that shine
> And twinkle on the milky way,
> They stretched in never-ending line
> Along the margin of a bay.

At another time he is thinking of the life past of Lucy, how much apart it was, how modest in its retirement; and as he thinks, he sees, at his feet and in the zenith, the unnoted solitary beauty of things :—

'A violet by a mossy stone
Half hidden from the eye!
—Fair as a star, when only one
Is shining in the sky.'

Often as I have read the tiny poem, it is always a fresh astonishment to find that flash between the two other verses,[1] so exclusively human in their sentiment and apparently so sufficing, so much, by themselves, exhaustive of their subject. To read them alone and without the middle one is to be conscious of a poet who feels his grief so elementally, his mind has room for no other thought. Here, surely, we would have said, is what we mean when we speak of any one as being contained by his emotion.

It is the same faculty of travelling to the world's end that enables him to enliven his village story of Ruth with the lights and colours of the West, to speak of the magnolia spread

'High as a cloud, high overhead,'

or to see, meeting at noontide, beneath his yew-trees, the shapes that make up man's inward dream.

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[1] 'She dwelt among the untrodden ways
Beside the springs of Dove,
A Maid whom there were none to praise
And very few to love.

. . . . . .

She lived unknown, and few could know
When Lucy ceased to be;
But she is in her grave, and, oh,
The difference to me!'

In speaking of his 'Phantom of delight,' his mind dances from the beauty of evening to that of morn and spans the revolving year :—

> 'Her eyes as stars of Twilight fair ;
> Like Twilight's, too, her dusky hair,
> But all things else about her drawn
> From May-time and the cheerful Dawn.'

Arnold has spoken of Wordsworth's 'healing power.' This power to soothe we all find in his poetry, but it is not due to those triumphs of reality or imagination. The opening of the grave which is man's breast, a freedom of imaginative play where 'the flashes come and go'—these have power to arrest the mind, not to soothe it. What soothes in Wordsworth's poetry is his tone.

Generally a lyric is consecrated to one note. Burns's lyrics to a remarkable degree are so, and it is true of all the rest. They are joyous or sad, charged with melancholy or with ardour, passionate or reflective ; but in Wordsworth's sedate lyrics the feeling is often mingled, and the shades that go to make up their twilight indistinct. The manner is never entirely sad or entirely joyous. And this song of 'serious faith and inward glee,' of an inner happiness that remembers sorrow, of a trust in the mind of man that will not be cast down, this curiously blended note of delight and regret, is especially Wordsworth's own. We read a happy lyric of his and we are not left entirely happy ; we read a poem steeped in melancholy and we are touched with an inexplicable joy. The story of the mountain child offering milk to the lamb, whose 'tail with pleasure shook,' fades into the heart like evening.

Among 'the hills where echoes play,' there intrudes

> 'That plaintive cry! which up the hill
> Comes from the depth of Dungeon-Ghyll.'

The morning's birth frames the tragedy of the Leech Gatherer in repose.

These lyrics, written under the influence of a contrariety of sensations, of a solemnness which permits of gaiety, and distinguished by a

> 'melancholy grace,
> Brought from a pensive though a happy place,'

leave the mind in a state of various or divided feeling, and affect as no other lyrical poetry can. Why Wordsworth alone should have this power is perhaps best answered by saying that there was only one Wordsworth, but certain it is that these poems have this effect; their devout happiness, their restrained and perfect grief, touch the mind in a manner different from the noblest work of other poets. Shakespeare can move us to laughter or to tears at his will, but he cannot leave the impression which such a poem as 'The Solitary Reaper' does. I suppose that the offices of her Church will produce in the devotee the same kind of subdued exaltation, the same spirit of renewal won from sorrow. Sunshine and shower, the varied colours of the rainbow arching the expectant earth, this is the very breath and being of these poems.

And yet, constantly, in Wordsworth's poetry there is, as Mr. Bradley has shown, something even deeper than this, and in its own way as unique. It is his profound sense of the illimitable; and this itself is based on a basic contact with reality, a deep earnestness which is sensible, and which, whatever the subject,

keeps its grip. Fantasy does not attract him; he writes nothing formal, and even when he praises virtue he speaks of what he knows.

How idle usually are those praises, and how untrue to our own knowledge of humanity. One puts up a formal prayer to a perfection in which one has never troubled seriously to believe, and Love and Fate and Duty are the most frequent terms in the vocabulary of the fool. When one opens an Ode to Duty one expects an idle dithyramb, but Wordsworth's Ode to Duty bristles with observation, and moral experiences are as accurately distinguished as the days of the week. It speaks from the ascertained fact. The comprehensiveness of the law of Duty as also the lightening of the moral stress which results from obedience to it—

> 'Flowers laugh before thee on their beds
> And fragrance in thy footing treads,'

are no more vividly realised than the frailty of man. The 'weight of chance desires,' the 'confidence of reason,' these are no words of course. The youthful, however, have not our anxiety; they have not known what it is to be astray, and there is a natural human kindness in the young and untried that prompts to good offices:—

> 'There are who ask not if thine eye
> Be on them; who, in love and truth,
> Where no misgiving is, rely
> Upon the genial sense of youth.'

This is true, and nearer to the fact of young life than either the doctrine of original sin or Rousseau's absolute opposition to it. Much of our predisposition to serve the self, the young share in common with us. What

they possess, and we do not, is their pleasedness with things, from which there overflows a pleasantness; but it is useless to attempt otherwise to define what Wordsworth has defined already.

'The Happy Warrior' extorts the same admiring wonder, and for the same qualities.[1] Wordsworth, in defining his ideal human being, keeps his finger on the list of human temptations. Good men there have been without number who have failed in life's battle from their inability, in the heat of strife, to 'keep the law in calmness made.' Brave men, whom 'no shape of danger can dismay,' have been seduced from the conflict by cherishing the 'tender happiness' of their home. And yet without the love of others to rely on, there is no support in difficulty. The laurel is not plucked by a narrow nature, and at least of a martyr it may be said that he is

> 'More brave for this, that he hath much to love.'

A poet who can write on such subjects without loosening his hold on the facts is very close to the reality of life. And it is on this deep consciousness of life's reality that Wordsworth builds his consciousness of a reality beyond it. Man will never be real if he is not real here. If he is real, for him there may be another reality. Man's life, if it is not related to the universal life, is nothing—a dream without a dreamer, the mere shadow of a shade. On the other hand, the full consciousness of the reality of the life of man involves its relation to an ultimate reality. On the nature and meaning of any individual life Wordsworth had brooded long; and so intensely does he realise it

[1] Wordsworth himself described it, in conversation with Miss Martineau, as 'a chain of extremely *valooable* thoughts.'

that he never realises it alone. The limited glows with so intense a light that it spreads its rays into the illimitable. His Michael, his Leech Gatherer, his dead Brother, his favoured Being gazing from the shore of Esthwaite on a beautiful prospect, his Cumberland Beggar, his Peter Bell, his Dion, his dead stag or guarding dog, the statued Newton, the friendless man in 'Guilt and Sorrow' who on must pace,

> 'perchance 'till night descend,
> Where'er the dreary roads their bare white lines extend,'

are not more 'each distinct and in his place' than they carry with them, each and all, a reference to something beyond, and this something is partly the general life of Nature and partly the mystery of life. Those figures owe their supernatural dignity to Wordsworth's consciousness that they are not bounded by their own beings, but are, in truth, unlimited and a part of all.

A strange thrill comes to us in these poems that are so full of a susceptibility to the mysterious, and that see in a pedlar the shadow of the whole. Nature, too, to a mind of this character, whispers strange secrets. The gross palpable shimmers in a haze, and a thorn, 'the oak beside the door,' a convicting mountain, the waste places and 'the one blasted tree,' seem about to become animate and to disclose themselves a spirit or a voice.

No graver tribute has been paid to Wordsworth in our generation than Mr. Bradley's[1] analysis of this

[1] *Oxford Lectures on Poetry*, 'Wordsworth,' where Mr. Bradley speaks (Hart-leap Well) of 'this feeling of the presence of mysterious inviolable powers behind the momentary powers of hard pleasure and empty pride.' He gives as instances of the side of Wordsworth's genius, adverted to above, the Leech Gatherer, and from the

side of his genius; for it is not a side, it is the very kernel of his poetry, and supplies the reason why it is sufficing.

A lady once said to me that what struck her most about Wordsworth's poems was their reminiscent quality, or, to be explicit, that Wordsworth's poetry has the power, more than that of others, of reviving in us recollections of our youth; one lays down the volume at a phrase and sees again one's nursery and vanished faces. The explanation of this is not obvious. It is not to be found in the fact, taken by itself, that Wordsworth writes peculiarly often about children, for other poets have done this without producing his effect.

The reason is, I think, Wordsworth's singular facility and felicity in bringing us in contact with the emotion as felt; that is to say, as we ourselves came in contact with it when we were young. People of middle age have lost this capacity of youth. One hears of the decease of a friend, and before one has had time to realise one's impression of personal loss, the intellect is busy relating this one death to the process of things.

Prelude, Book II., the convicting mountain (the stealing of the prey of the snares is a parallel passage, and both speak to a common experience of childhood—the voice of conscience becoming animate in inanimate things); *Prelude*, Book IV., the old soldier; *Prelude*, Book VII., the London beggar; *Prelude*, Book XII., the distinctness of recollected impressions on a mind strung to a high pitch by sorrow.

'The single sheep, and the one blasted tree.'

The Arab riding into the distance, Book V., is also an instance of Mr. Bradley's. In the same essay Mr. Bradley speaks of the connection of this feeling of infinity and the endless passing of limits with Wordsworth's love of wandering, wanderers, and high roads.

One is praised and, before one has time to feel a delighted glow, one realises the relative unimportance of all possible praise and all possible achievement. One is out on a spring afternoon, lying on the Surrey heather, watching a pigeon sailing above the faint blush of the wood that the hill carries to a sky of mauve. One is conscious of no ecstasy. There float in the mind a dozen pictures of remembered scenes. In later life every experience that comes to us is harmonised by memory or by experience, is generalised before it strikes.

But in early youth how different! A sharp reproof, a box of chocolate, a playmate on the sands, the death of a canary, the expectation when the black-gowned clergyman stopped, after giving out his text, before beginning his sermon, one's drowsy ageing neighbour in the Scottish church; how real it was, and all we needed to be Wordsworths was his power of expression. As we felt then, Wordsworth speaks, and when he speaks the dusty interval is gone—

> 'For the same sound is in our ears
> Which in those days we heard.'

Children, though, of course, they express their feelings very broadly and crudely,—and besides, nobody marks them,—have the same faculty of immediacy of feeling that Wordsworth has. Their minds are swept with each separate emotion, joy, pain, fear, grief, perceive it as it is, and have room for nothing else.[1] It is, there-

[1] This is the reason too why children do not care for Wordsworth's poems, and see nothing in them. To them what Wordsworth talks about is quite familiar, and he merely voices their sensations. Poor Susan is no miracle to a child—on the contrary, a bare account of what is constantly happening; and though the child does not

fore, his instinct for an affinity that leads Wordsworth to speak so often of them. Their one-ideaedness, their persistency in an idea when formed, their capacity for concentration, the poignancy of their joy or absorption in their grief, the way in which they are 'taken up' with what they are doing, this made them his fellow-citizens in a land peopled by foreigners who never feel. He has said the wisest and most beautiful things about children, as also the most memorable things about that death in us when our youth is dead.

In the great Ode he is indeed hampered by a false philosophy; but so keen is his eye for the facts of child-life that it is starred with phrases that describe it as it has never been described.

As we know, the explicit teaching of the Ode is fanciful;[1] it deals with the belief in pre-existence, a

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know this, this is the reason why it is not excited by the poem. Tennyson's *Idylls* are the children's paradise; they are as strange to them as Poor Susan is to us; they speak of a magic world. Poor Susan speaks to us of what we have come to know as the only magic in the world, the magical sensations of youth.

[1] Arnold in his Essay on Wordsworth has a pregnant hint on this subject, but he dismisses Wordsworth rather airily, and does not seek for the amount of actual truth that is the secret of the Ode's permanent attraction. What pleases the highest minds can never be merely 'a play of fancy.'

'Even the "intimations" of the famous Ode, those corner-stones of the supposed philosophic system of Wordsworth,—the idea of the high instincts and affections coming out in childhood, testifying of a divine home recently left, and fading away as our life proceeds,—this idea, of undeniable beauty as a play of fancy, has itself not the character of poetic truth of the best kind; it has no real solidity. The instinct of delight in Nature and her beauty had, no doubt, extraordinary strength in Wordsworth himself as a child. But to say that universally this instinct is mighty in childhood, and tends to die away afterwards, is to say what is extremely doubtful. In many people, perhaps with the majority of educated persons, the

belief which, like all other beliefs, is incapable of proof, but which, unlike many beliefs, is no part of the common life of the mind.

Wordsworth had observed that the child takes a rapturous delight in the beauty of earth, which is unknown, at least in its rapture, to the grown man. He had also observed that the child is not oppressed by the notion of death, but, on the contrary, assumes that it itself and its surroundings will continue as they are; has, in fact, the greatest difficulty in accepting the idea of Finis, and will even on occasion persist in supposing its dead companions to be not dead but translated, still somewhere alive and in a sense still with it. Wordsworth, moreover, had observed that always at the period of adolescence there is a fierce struggle on the part of every youth to resist the conclusion, at length irrefutable, that he himself must perish. Other people die, it is true, but I shall not die. I shall be translated in a chariot of fire. The Judgment-day will

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love of Nature is nearly imperceptible at ten years old, but strong and operative at thirty. In general we may say of these high instincts of early childhood, the base of the alleged systematic philosophy of Wordsworth, what Thucydides says of the early achievements of the Greek race :—"It is impossible to speak with certainty of what is so remote; but from all that we can really investigate, I should say that they were no very great things."'

This is, of course, true if we mean by 'love of Nature' what we commonly understand by it. The fact of child-life on which Wordsworth is entitled to remark is not in this sense a love of Nature at all, the love of Nature known to the mature mind, but rather, a delight in 'Earth,' *a satisfiedness* with the mortal condition (because not realised to *be* mortal) and its natural setting. The child is delighted with life, and is very easily irritated by any cessation of activity. I have seen a child smack a ball because it wouldn't bounce high enough. But as long as it continues to bounce all is well. Life laughs with surrounding life.

come before my term; at least somehow, in some manner, in a world that perishes, I shall be persistent. This exception made finally in favour of oneself, for it cannot be denied that others die, sets in opposition one's own will to live and the perishableness of others, an opposition which one attempts to resolve by a crude idealism. These others who die, they are part of my dream. I become conscious of the shadowy nature of a world in which range change and decay. But the material world returns, and when the mind is asleep I come out of my dream, only, however, to slide back into it with recurrent persistence whenever my inner life returns. My real life, the life of my attentive mind, is occupied with

> 'obstinate questionings
> Of sense and outward things,
> Fallings from us, vanishings.'

At this period the individual life is paramount, and the material world unreal. As we grow older we lose this sense of superiority, and the world in our habitual mind is greater than ourselves. There is, in Wordsworth's words, a 'subjugation of an opposite character.'[1] To the ordinary gross citizen what he can see, feel, and handle is the touchstone of reality.

These are the observed facts. I do not think there can be any doubt about them, but Wordsworth proceeds to invent a theory to account for them. Before,

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[1] Wordsworth's own words are as follows: 'Nothing was more difficult for me in childhood than to admit the notion of death as a state applicable to my own being. I have said elsewhere,

> "A simple child,
> That lightly draws its breath,
> And feels its life in every limb,
> What should it know of death!"

however, discussing this theory, it is necessary to say that, in paraphrasing, I have relied, and purposely relied, on his long introductory note to the Ode, and not on the Ode itself. In the paraphrase it will be noticed that the experiences of which I speak, and of which Wordsworth speaks in his introductory note, extend over a considerable period of time. They are the account of the process of the mind from childhood to adolescence, and from adolescence to maturity. The rapturous delight in earth is known to a child of six; the crude idealism to a youth of sixteen, and dates from the moment when the youth is first faced with the certain apprehension of his own decease. Wordsworth himself in his note does not attempt, as I understand him, (he says, 'when going to school,') to date this idealism earlier than his early teens, and of all youths Wordsworth was the soonest mature. In the poem, however, this strictness of chronology, which is essential to the truth of the observations, is by no means

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But it was not so much from feelings of animal vivacity that *my* difficulty came as from a sense of the indomitableness of the Spirit within me. I used to brood over the stories of Enoch and Elijah, and almost to persuade myself that, whatever might become of others, I should be translated, in something of the same way, to Heaven. With a feeling congenial to this, I was often unable to think of external things as having external existence, and I communed with all that I saw as something not apart from, but inherent in, my own immaterial nature. Many times while going to school have I grasped at a wall or tree to recall myself from this abyss of idealism to the reality. At that time I was afraid of such processes. In later periods of life I have deplored, as we all have reason to do, a subjugation of an opposite character, and have rejoiced over the remembrances, as is expressed in the lines—

> "obstinate questionings
> Of sense and outward things,
> Fallings from us, vanishings,"' etc.

preserved. All these experiences are spoken of loosely, as if they might be those of the actual child, and this adds a difficulty of interpretation. Moreover, this looseness is a vital defect when Wordsworth points to these experiences as a proof of pre-existence.

These experiences, he says, belong to the child and not to the man ; they are more spiritual than the man's, and if the human being, at the moment of its emergence, is in its most spiritual state, it must have brought its spirituality with it ; those 'clouds of glory' must trail from a former spiritual life.

But this argument immediately dissolves when we reflect that the experiences of which Wordsworth is speaking are in no sense the experiences of a child, and, so far from being experiences of first contact, are experiences gradually and successively evolved through a long series of years by the individual's contact with life ; the most spiritual of them, moreover, (I mean the crude idealism of the youth of sixteen), the one on which Wordsworth chiefly relies, being the last to evolve.

The fact is, of course, that these experiences are not spiritual at all, and Wordsworth's fond thesis that the child is more spiritual than the man is the exact contrary of the fact. The child does take a more rapturous delight in earth than its elders, because, for it, earth is not touched with decay. How could it *not* take a rapturous delight in earth thus seen? The procession of the seasons, the unchanging faces of our friends, the body that never reminds us of its existence, bones as supple as a twig, sight, sense, taste and sound thronging and exhaustless in their change, the

mother ever young; what further Paradise is to be imagined in Heaven when all things are renewed? In the child's world there is no death; the flame bubbles without consuming coal, and the same bird sings every Spring.

It is true, also, that the youth resists the realisation of death, not knowledge of it (that he acquires almost at once), but realisation of it as a fact for him, and that he would sell the reality of the Universe to preserve his bright life and escape the law of all. The actual child accepts its surroundings with extraordinary composure, and as a matter of course. It is only when the child is in process of becoming a man, when it begins to think, as in Wordsworth's case it began far sooner than usual, that questions arise. They arise with all of us, and when they arise, be it early or late, our childhood is past. What was accepted as stable is no longer accepted; the world becomes unreal, and when the 'victim' has passed through this trial and acquiesced in his doom, his surroundings are no longer what they were.[1] As men we are in a prison-house, because as youths we have tried to escape from it. 'The glory and the freshness of a dream' has passed away from earth because we can no longer believe that here we are to remain. All this happens, but it does not happen because the child is more spiritual than the man, but because it is less spiritual; because in its animal vivacity and its *insouciance* it relates itself to no other life than earth's. It is Death and Death alone, and the conviction of it, that creates

[1] 'The Clouds that gather round the setting sun
Do take a sober colouring from an eye
That hath kept watch o'er man's mortality.'

an apprehension of the spiritual,[1] and a being hungering for a reality behind the seen. The child puts its trust in an illusion and is happy. The man, trembling on the edge of an infinity, weeps for what is gone, but because he knows of that infinity he is man.

Something less than justice,[2] then, is done to our spiritual nature in the 'Intimations,' and part of the poem, a very small part, is occupied in explicitly preaching a doctrine which is not only fanciful but derogatory to human dignity. These portions the world has, in part, cheerfully forgotten, or remembers only by attaching another meaning and accepting them as a testimonial to childhood.

What does remain, and remains imperishably, is the description of the first awaking rapture to the joy of Earth, and the even more beautiful description of its passing, of the sorrow which is stirred in us when we regard the beauty of what was once our imperishable home. A poet may preach a doctrine we must dismiss, and say things we cannot forget. It is because the things he says are true.

In Wordsworth's Nature poetry there is initially a similar difficulty; the doctrine he preaches about Nature is, on the face of it, false. In representing Nature as in basic sympathy with man, as a guide and instructress, in conforming one's life to whom one may

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[1] Cp. Meredith in 'Youth in Memory':

'To feel that heaven must we that hell sound through.'

[2] Some justice is done towards the close—

'rather find
Strength in what remains behind,'

but it is inadequate. To do full justice, the process of the poem would have had to be an ascent, not a descent. In fact, the idea of a 'Fall' is just as fallacious for the individual as for the race.

become more humane, he is at radical issue with scientific fact. And this divergence is his own invention. He did not learn it, any more than he learnt his doctrine of pre-existence, from the wandering current of Rousseauism. He added both to Rousseau's comparatively simple doctrines of original virtue and natural peace. Rousseau has no theories about inanimate Nature ; his love of her is merely his protest against the eighteenth-century preference of urban to rural man. He loves Nature because she is free, quiet, and full of variety ; because, at Les Charmettes or The Hermitage, he can escape from the city.[1] In contradistinction to the eighteenth century, he loves her just because she is uncultivated, and has not, like a Dutch garden, been taught to behave. He finds her a place in which he can dream his dreams of the untainted individual, and suppose himself to enjoy that state of Nature which existed before politics and houses. Nor is he a devotee of the beauties of Nature for themselves ; the periwinkle is dear to him because it reminds him of a past and dear episode ; he has no special fondness for the 'tall and gloomy rock,' though he likes it in its place. In short, as Lord Morley has pointed out, he is a virtuoso in landscape who likes the confusion, the mixture, a soft smiling foreground with

[1] 'I was so tired of fine rooms, fountains, artificial groves and flower-beds, and the still more tiresome people who displayed all these ; I was so worn out with pamphlets, card-playing, music, silly jokes, stupid airs, great suppers, that as I spied a poor hawthorn copse, a hedge, a farmstead, a meadow, as in passing through a hamlet I snuffed the odour of a good chervil omelette, as I heard from a distance the rude refrain of the shepherds' songs, I used to wish at the devil the whole tale of rouge and furbelows.'—*Confessions*: passage translated by Lord Morley.

trees, leading to a background occupied by hills. Not in any Wordsworthian sense a priest of Nature, Rousseau turns to her for relief and calm. This was, according to Arthur Young, to set the fashion in country-houses, or in our more hurried conceptions, to be a week-ender.

What is new in Wordsworth is his philosophy of Nature. His exceptional fondness for those scenes which are especially solitary and grand, and in which man feels himself alone with the Universe, was his own. The assumption, underlying all he writes, that Nature's life beats responsive to human life, was not taught him by any one.

But this poetry of Wordsworth's brings a new and strange comfort to us, and the joy we take in it, even the best informed among us, is so deep and so persistent that it cannot be due to its falsity, but, on the contrary, must be traceable to an inner truth. In what way, then, can we say that a doctrine or philosophy of Nature, which is openly opposed to what we know about the world, is true? This question for a long time troubled me. There is, of course, one obvious answer, and once it satisfied my mind.

This, at least, is certain, that as much as Wordsworth's doctrine is opposed to objective fact, it is in consonance with subjective fact. Though Nature is not in sympathy with man, man believes she is. It is his unconscious habit so to think, and what Wordsworth says of Nature is true of what man feels about Nature. It is true for the imagination ; it is what we call poetic truth. The sun seems to rise and fall, and therefore it is more truthful, and less of a shock, to speak of the setting sun than of the turning earth. Middlesex turned away

from the sun, the shadows lengthened, it was night. This reads very affectedly, and is not an accurate or truthful record of what any one feels.

The weakness of this argument, however, is that we do not, as modern men, feel that Nature sympathises with us in the same constant and unvarying manner that we feel the sun falls. If the instance were perfect it would suffice, but it is not perfect. It is imperfect in two ways: in the way stated about our casual feeling, and in a further and contrary way. We know, when we say the sun falls, that it does not fall, that to say it falls is simply a manner of speech. We do not *know* when we say Nature sympathises with us that she does not sympathise. We do not *know* that to say she sympathises is merely a manner of speech. That is not an accurate account of what happens in our minds. What happens in our minds, when Wordsworth tells us that Nature sympathises, is that we are troubled. We do not know that she does, but we are by no means as certain that she does not as we are certain that the sun is comparatively stationary. The amount of subjective truth in the two instances is different; and the amount of subjective truth in Wordsworth's doctrine does not explain, at all adequately, what we feel about its inner truth.

Nor will any other mechanical explanation of our half assent quite satisfy us. It may be said, of course, that while Wordsworth's doctrine of a sympathising Nature is opposed to what we know of scientific fact, we do know that there is a correspondent alteration. Nature is not affected by the moods of man, but man is affected by the moods of Nature. The day is not

dreary because I am sad, but I am miserable without the sun. June is not June because people wed, but they wed because it is June. This is true, but to explain Wordsworth's philosophy of Nature by saying it is a truth stated the wrong way round is a child's trick.

The real explanation is much wider, and embraces all these attempted answers. What Wordsworth's Nature poetry emphasises is the intimate connection between Nature's life and our own. When all is said, we are human because we can read Nature, and we interpret everything in her terms. Nature does 'enter into mysterious and wonder-working union with the spirit of man.'[1] She does speak to us and we speak her tongue. This Universe is our home. 'Man is placed in the centre of things, and a ray of relation passes from every other being to him.' We make use of everything in Nature, the tree and the 'earth bone' to build houses, the flax to make us clothes. 'Words are signs of natural facts. Right means straight, wrong means twisted.' . . . 'It is not words only that are emblematic, it is things which are emblematic.' 'Every natural fact is a symbol of some spiritual fact.' 'Light and darkness are familiar expressions for knowledge and ignorance.' From Nature also we do gain a reinforcement of moral quality, tranquillity from the sky, firmness from the rock, equanimity from the plain. Our lives, at their highest, find an appropriate setting in natural surroundings.

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[1] This argument is wiser than the present writer was. I am indebted to an admirable piece of writing in the *Manchester Guardian* (Nov. 8, 1904) criticising an essay I published in that year.

Leonidas dies in 'the steep defile of Thermopylæ.' 'The boat of Columbus' glides in among the Savannahs of the West. The body rests in the quiet earth. How is it that a woman reminds us of a flower, and the evening of death? What song does Spring sing in our ear?[1]

Wordsworth's poetry, like all the greatest poetry, is based upon the fact, and it is perhaps greatest in this, that it bears witness, more than any other poetry, to the chief fact of life. It is its peculiar office to remind us that we are a part of a whole, a whole which is cousin to us, and which speaks to us in each activity, from the flame in the grate to the incandescence of the stars. For the purposes of this relation, it does not matter whether Nature or Man brings most to the other. The Universe is there for us to interpret, but it is not dumb. It is not dumb because in it there breathes the life which is also ours.

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[1] The quotations are from Emerson's *Nature*.

BYRON

WORDSWORTH represents best the attitude of soul which was the Revolution's, Shelley its inner idea, and Coleridge its romantic afflatus; but if the historian wishes to see how the ordinary man of the period was affected by that vast and new movement, he will not turn to Wordsworth, Coleridge, or Shelley, he will turn to Byron. He represents best the effect of the Revolution. A sea scourged into commotion tells you better what a storm does than the thunder and lightning; and Byron's representation is wide enough to represent, not the English effect alone, but the European effect. So variously, episodically, and unreasoningly does he respond, that you get in his poems just the impetus and upheaval produced over the whole Continent. Chief of all, he is the poet of his time; he is not a minor writer, the bigness of his spirit enables him to represent the effect of big forces as no minor writer can; and his huge basis of ordinariness is of this happy service to him that it makes him easily typical of popular results.

As Wordsworth felt the Revolution, few could feel it; as Byron felt it, every one. Allowing for the added intensity, the larger scale of a big nature, his responses were the responses of all. He set the emotions of the crowd to music, their various and often contradictory emotions, pre-Revolutionary, Revolutionary, and post-Revolutionary; the whole con-

tents of the disturbed ordinary European mind. This is one of the reasons why he was read so much abroad, and it is one of the reasons for his established place in our literature. What he did was not a little thing to do; no one else did it. There is always only one who can ever do any given thing perfectly. Byron perfectly represents — indeed Byron is, pre-Revolutionary man as affected by the Revolution.

To fill a *rôle* of this kind many qualities are necessary, and the nicest arrangement of circumstances. The circumstances of Byron at once set him firmly in the established order, and introduced an atmosphere of disturbance from the start. He came of the class that for the last hundred and fifty years had ruled England, and while still at Harrow became a member of the oligarchic council. He was provided with a stake in the country and a platform when in his teens. At the same time, he was not born in the purple; his home was poor (the typical cottage opposite the Park gate), he had a club foot which offended him, and a mother with a gusty temper. As full of worldly sensibility as of worldliness, he dissolves in tears when first saluted as *Dominus*.

From Harrow he proceeded to Cambridge, where, studying boxing and keeping a tame bear, he condescended upon the modest love for letters, then prevalent in that sober place, by publishing a book of poems with the contemptuous title *Hours of Idleness*. It is safe to say that no volume less fruitful in promise was ever produced by a poet subsequently eminent. And though, fortified with subsequent knowledge, we may find in these trifles some of the dispositions which Byron maintained or developed later, especially

his maddening habit of stressing the metre as if his readers were metrically deaf, had he not been fortunately a peer, and had there not fortunately been Whigs in the world, his little book would have shot straight into oblivion's pool. The notice in the *Edinburgh Review* was roughly equivalent to its subject — it was surprising that a lord should write verses, and that, if he wrote them, he should print verses so poor—but it stung Byron into fury. There is always this thrust and riposte in his life; everything contributes to his career.

It has been the habit of critics to speak slightingly of *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, and certainly, as satire, it is not good. Byron hits out in all directions, and his denunciations have not the necessary basis of truth. Pope wounded Addison because Atticus recognised the portrait; but to say to Jeffrey that he is in danger of the hangman's cord, to Wordsworth that he is vulgar, to use the words Walter Scott as three syllables of contempt, is to say to Arnold that his poems are amorous, or to speak of some one as being as unamusing as Dickens. One shaft alone went home, that which was aimed at Moore.

Yet if *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* has, as satire, no vitality, it was sufficient to display the vitality of its author. These random shafts do not wound, but they fly fast and sing: reckless daring takes the fancy, and the effect is that of promiscuous force. The Edinburgh Reviewer provoked into life the most puissant personality England had. In this satire Byron comes into being and hurtles upon the stage of the world.

Such an exhibition could not pass unnoticed; its

clangour, its 'vim,' its random brutality exactly caught the fancy of Byron's public. John Bull with a genius, he lived before John Bull was deceased.

Thus famous, Byron devoted himself for the next two years to representing, though unconsciously, the gurgitations of his time. On his return from abroad he published in February 1812 the first two Cantos of *Childe Harold*, and thereafter remained, in the eyes of his contemporaries, the monarch of Parnassus. There flows from him, for three years, romance after romance, full, as was proper in the days of the Regent and Napoleon, of gallantry and war; Giaours, Conrads, Laras, that unite an occasional, but occasionally brilliant, descriptive power, and a rattling liveliness of narrative, with what have come to be the commonplaces of the romantic stage.

The success was too heady, and these poems are without reality. Byron mirrors the popular aspirations and tendencies, though unconsciously, too exhaustively. In these forceful extravaganzas, where all the energies of youth hurry across a background of world melancholy, there is too much for effect. This was not Byron; it was a mirror in which the heavy boobies of the day could see the development of passions which as they fancied, and fancied perhaps rightly, lay undeveloped within them. Their daughters were as wise, and many a demure maid must have soaked her pillow thinking how well she understood—she whom an unhappy fate had confined at a boarding-school—the sorrows of the Bride of Abydos. The roar of Jemappes had died away, but it had left to a world, familiarised with startling developments, such possibilities of sympathy.

Fortunately for the world, for how often it profits by the misfortunes of men of genius, Byron was not much longer to enjoy circumstances so 'proudly fine.' On the second of January 1815 he married Miss Milbanke, and within the year the crash came. His tinsel glory fell from him; the hero became the outlaw, and the darling of society its assailant.

Of all the tricks of the genius of literature this is the most pleasing. At a turn of the hand the pose became a fact. There was now a dark secret; there was now good ground both for melancholy and disappointment; there was now a breach with law. Everything Byron had imagined of picturesque in personal fate now attached to his own. He was not unaware of the effectiveness of the reality, and in this sense the pose continues, but the pose is now the pose of the fact. He wears his outlaw circumstances as a foreign cloak of distinction, but they are his circumstances. The theatricality continues, but the drama is now no longer *Childe Harold*, it is Byron. Everything he writes after 1815 is real, not, of course, with the inner reality of unstudied emotion, but real in no trivial sense, as real as its author. This division between the two parts of Byron's poetical career Arnold did not observe. He was not careful to distinguish between a theatricality almost pure and a manner which, though of the theatre, had the matter supplied to it. The early Byron had not sufficient reality to be a poet above the third rank; the later Byron has sufficient reality for his purpose; not enough to be Wordsworth, but enough—a real sincerity and trueness to himself—to be Byron. The highest kind of inner sincerity, that which belongs to the greatest poets, Byron did not

possess; a lower but genuine kind, that which is necessary to an orator, in the later part of his career and then in a high degree, he did.

In his earlier period one can trace in embryo many faculties, but there are only two that are ripely developed, those of copiousness and descriptive power. Both those faculties appear more remarkable when, as in the later period, his mind has a wider content; and yet what is truly as remarkable, when we consider the levity of the earlier matter, is their pronounced development so soon.

Byron's descriptive power always is highly vivid, more vivid than Scott's, and this perhaps was what Scott was thinking of when he said 'Byron bet me.'[1] It is, however, always descriptive power pure and simple. The scene is realised without being real. After having read the description, the picture, of Mazeppa for instance, is printed on your mind forever, without either seeming a part of actual life or making life more real. This is not always due to the isolated character of the incidents, as at the close of Lara (the last of Ezzelin, Arnold calls the passage); for the impression is similar where Byron describes an assault, Parisina's swoon or cry, the mustering for battle before Waterloo, or Venice. It is due to an excess of vividness, or let me rather say to a vividness in excess of what life wears. It is as if you saw life through an opera-glass. But this is a distinguishing feature of Byron's vision, which is as much a defect as a merit.

[1] Scott, of course, meant primarily that Byron had outdistanced him with the public; but there is a tribute as well as a statement in the phrase.

In life for all of us everything in sight is to some degree harmonised by a neighbouring object ; the unequivocal green of the grass modifies the impression which is made by the young and almost yellow birch in spring. We see sideways as well as direct, and it is seldom anything splashes at us. We have to look at a daffodil through our hands to see how golden it is. Truth to this fact of human life we call in art a sense of relation, and this sense Byron, till he comes to write his satires, does not give. When we say then that Byron's descriptive power compared to the descriptive power of Scott is astonishingly vivid, we are distinguishing, not undilutedly praising. The most vivid incidents in Scott, the fight of Fitzjames and Roderick Dhu, are not the most real. A more fluid character, and therefore a further reality, attaches to the account of the stag-hunt, the process of which in memory is dim. Byron's wonderful descriptive power has some of the characteristics of sensational art. His habit of isolating the object of sight (not of feeling) involves a falsity, and so much is this true that the descriptions that seem most real are those of objects necessarily and of their nature isolated—Mazeppa and the Prisoner of Chillon, for example. Here you may quarrel with the selection of too effective subjects, but you cannot quarrel with the concentration of vision.

His other faculty of copiousness is a pure merit, or it is a pure merit for him. It was the faculty that enabled him to display a rich nature moving variously, to display it in all its affections, and to give the effect of a whole. Of all poets Byron is he who is least to be represented by any process of selection. Beauties there are, and Arnold has made a happy selection of

them, but the reader of Arnold's little volume has not the faintest idea of the poet. You might as well attempt to represent a kaleidoscope by a few pieces of brightly coloured glass. The whole thing is in the shake, the process of transmutation. Undergoing this process the over-vividness of the parts is not so offensive; you have not time to be properly affronted. Especially was this so as the range of his outlook increased, and thus his faculty of copiousness stood him always in increasing stead. It is the most dangerous of qualities, for while a small man can squeeze and restrain his output till there is something that is at least pruned of what is bad, there must be genuine virtue to be served by a gushing display. And indeed there was. Byron's faults were many, but no bigger or more generous heart ever beat in human bosom. Beside Wordsworth Byron often looks a child, but beside Byron Wordsworth sometimes a little man.[1] In modern times there are only two personalities at all comparable, those of Shakespeare and Napoleon. There is not intensity alone, or one might add Shelley; there is volume, there is gusto. The third and fourth Cantos of *Childe Harold* are like the impression of a larger world produced in the House of Commons when Mr. Gladstone got on his legs. *Manfred* is like Mr. Parnell's last manifesto ('the English wolves'); to read through the letters is to come in contact with a vitality beside which one's own life, though lived in the actual, pales; *Don Juan* in the

[1] See the stories in Carlyle's Reminiscences, in the *Journal* of the Rev. Julian Charles Young (Macmillan, 1871), and in Miss Martineau's *Autobiography*.

verity of its abandon is the unguarded display, and how rare a thing, of man in society.

I suppose, but for the clamant exception of Shakespeare, we might say that no purely poetical force can display a copiousness equal to this. Great poetry is a selected portion even of a great poet's feeling. We feel, when reading Wordsworth or Milton, that we are allowed intimacy only with the best part of their being. There is a reserve; the kind of reserve that prevents Heaven including Purgatory and the Inferno. Byron's effusiveness and heedless haste make him the friend of every one. He lives in that 'devil-may-care' which enchants the 'purblind race of miserable men.' But this conquest of the world is due to personal causes, and is, though a literary, not a poetical triumph. The very qualities which make Byron so effective as a force and as a satirist make against him in the field of pure poetry. Copiousness alone, if it is not a poetical copiousness, is a disservice poetically.

To write a social satire Byron was exactly fitted, and in the success of *Don Juan* everything in his circumstances had part. Those who condemn society generally condemn it from the hermit's cave, or, at least, without ever having been able to partake of its life, their own solitariness of spirit fencing them among the crowd. But Byron knew society; he was exempt from hardly one of its brassier vices; he knew the ordinary man—at bottom he *was* an ordinary man, sharing his loves and admirations; in himself he was an exaggeration of his virtues, his veins throbbed with his ardours. And this society, this world of elbowing men and attendant women whose vision was his, had shut him out from Paradise. The way of the world

had defeated him, and in return he is Mephistopheles to the way of the world. The whole thing is a mockery —the laugh of a fiend who denies that everything that is usual is good. He claims the license of the aristocrat to sneer at home virtues, and the liberty of the outlaw generously to admire. Feeling, observation, irony, a welter of incidents, popular political notions, the cant of the governing class, flat tirades, that attitude towards women which peculiarly belongs to the vulgar male, the most obvious and bluntest sarcasm, at times satire the smoothest and most insinuating because freely dashed with sentiment, a frequent voluptuous charm, these jostle each other. Taken together they give a view of a world ; they are related, or at least one thing relates itself to the next. Nowhere is Byron's merit of copiousness of greater service, nowhere is the kaleidoscope turned more quickly. The colours are all high, but they flash past and change one into another. It is not necessary to claim imperishable excellence for *Don Juan*, but it has a permanent appeal to the society to which it was addressed. Men of the world, and of that world, no doubt, become fewer as civilisation becomes increasingly democratised, and the man whose favourite reading is *Don Juan* is now often a sorry fellow. Something of the short day of the orator attaches to this consummate effort of Byron's muse, but it has the highest rank as a personal and social document. There is no whispered sound in it too fine to catch the ear of the ordinary citizen, and no work with so little of permanence will continue to be so permanently read.

What is the species of poetic merit to which a nature capable, and chiefly capable, of such an achievement

can attain? In considering this we shall have to enter on a series of qualified statements.

Metrical facility Byron does possess, an unusual command of almost all the metres in common time. But his metrical ear is not delicate. The metre is metre in black and white :—

> 'Since our Country, our God—oh my Sire!
> Demand that thy Daughter expire.'

Too often it is like this, like a dentist's operation ; and the occasions on which Byron conforms to the inner law of the rhythm, without pronouncing the law at every foot, are rarer than with any other poet of his rank. For this reason his blank verse is very unreadable. Blank verse depends in an especial degree for the fluidity of its effect upon the harmony of regularity with irregularity. There must be a variation sufficient to destroy the monotony without destroying the regularity of the beat. It goes to a time-tune in the poet's head, and since it does is capable, with each new poet, of new variety. What looseness of expression to say that the *Two Gentlemen of Verona* and *Lear* are written in the same metre! The fact is, there is an inner metre, widely different, which however in both cases expresses itself in common form. We may say blank verse is no more than an instrument on which every poet can play his own music. The music is not partly supplied from without, as rhyme and the stanza supply it, nor does it rely in the same way as other poetry upon a series of separate effects. A poem in blank verse, if it is to be a poem, must depend for its poetical effect upon one effect—the poetical effect of the whole. And for a sustained

poetical effort of this kind Byron is peculiarly unsuited. Even in the short efforts of lyrical poetry his success is episodic.

Shall we find in the matter a more constant attainment of a strictly poetical kind? The inquiry is not a hopeful one, for the kind of formal defect that exists in Byron's poetry (not every kind of formal defect) implies a defect in the substance; it implies a bluntness.

Arnold, indeed, quotes two very beautiful lines from Byron—lines that combine the sympathetic emotion of Wordsworth with a captivating sentiment:—

> 'He heard it, but he heeded not—his eyes
> Were with his heart, and that was far away';

and Arnold adds, 'Of verse of this high quality Byron has much,' but to speak so is surely thoughtless. This verse, describing the dying gladiator's state of mind as he hears the shout for the victor, is not properly to be described as verse of high quality; it is of the highest quality. There is here the quiet absoluteness of the greatest poetry—saying all; and of verse of this quality it would be much truer to say that Byron has nothing more. Interpretative power of this order, with the exception of one or two surprising instances, is simply not his.[1] This is the kind of thing Byron

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[1] Perhaps a phrase in 'The Dream':—

> 'But the old mansion, and the accustom'd hall,
> And the remember'd chambers, and the place,
> The day, the hour, the sunshine, and the shade.'

Though this is preceded and even immediately followed by a flatness:—

> 'What business had they there at such a time?'

generally writes when he is making a poetical effort, exercising a free imagination :—

> 'The sky is changed !—and such a change ! Oh Night
> And storm, and darkness, ye are wondrous strong,
> Yet lovely in your strength, as is the light
> Of a dark eye in woman !'

That is dreadful.

> The stars are forth, the moon above the tops
> Of the snow-shining mountains,—Beautiful !
> I linger yet with Nature, for the night
> Hath been to me a more familiar face
> Than that of man.'

That is strained ; and of such writing, of attempted poetry, there is a great deal in Byron—a great deal where a little would be too much.

Sometimes what is attempted is achieved, and the result is poetry, the occasional delicacy of the feeling even informing the metre :—

> 'There be none of Beauty's daughters
> With a magic like thee ;
> And like music on the waters
> Is thy sweet voice to me.'

But the note is not deep, nor is it sustained. Sometimes, too, where the result is very successful, we are still conscious of the effort. There are the verses which Byron, returning from a ball, wrote on Miss Wilmot, who had worn a dark dress with spangles :—

> 'She walks in beauty, like the night
> Of cloudless climes and starry skies ;
> And all that 's best of dark and bright
> Meet in her aspect and her eyes :
> Thus mellow'd to that tender light
> Which heaven to gaudy day denies.

One shade the more, one ray the less,
Had half impair'd the nameless grace
Which waves in every raven tress,
Or softly lightens o'er her face ;
Where thoughts serenely sweet express
How pure, how dear their dwelling-place.

And on that cheek, and o'er that brow,
So soft, so calm, yet eloquent,
The smiles that win, the tints that glow,
But tell of days in goodness spent,
A mind at peace with all below,
A heart whose love is innocent !'

One has but to compare this with Wordsworth's 'She was a phantom of delight,' to feel the understrain. Byron's piece has the mellowness which was his ; it is full, exceptionally full, of the ripeness of his exotic charm, and yet we feel it hovering, as if about to settle on contrast and antithesis. The 'tender light,' the 'gaudy day,' 'the one shade more,' the opposition between a gentle innocence and a splendid dark beauty —such are contrasted effects. Evident, too, is the appeal, as evident as the definition, nothing of the shadow that there is in Wordsworth's

'Her eyes as stars of twilight fair ;
Like twilight's, too, her dusky hair.'

Nor is it merely shadow to express which Byron's words are too plain :—

'But all things else about her drawn
From May-time and the cheerful dawn.'

Wordsworth's feeling is so intimate it often cannot be expressed without using unfamiliar terms.

A crucial instance of this lack of inner delicacy is to be found in Byron's imitation of Sappho.

This is what he says :—

'Oh, Hesperus ! thou bringest all good things—
Home to the weary, to the hungry cheer,
To the young bird the parent's brooding wings,
The welcome stall to the o'er-labour'd steer ;
Whate'er of peace about our hearthstone clings,
Whate'er our household gods protect of dear,
Are gather'd round us by thy look of rest ;
Thou bring'st the child, too, to the mother's breast.'

This is Sappho :—

'Oh evening, bringing all that morning scattered, thou bringest the sheep, thou bringest the goat, thou bringest the child back to her mother.'

It may be said that no one could have paraphrased those words, in which so much is said by saying so little, without spoiling them ; but it is safe to say Byron was quite innocent that he had here exchanged an immortal verse for a pathetic one. The enumeration, the antithesis, the afterthought, he could not see as merely the alloy of the man of prose. A plainness of this kind was for him beyond even appreciation : he did not feel with sufficient intimacy, with sufficient poetic sincerity, to know how close is Sappho to the truth of feeling.

Is Byron not then sincere? He is sincere, singularly outspoken and sincere, but the connection between the impression and the expressed feeling is by no means instantaneous. Indeed we might almost say, though to say it is a contradiction in terms, that there is no instantaneous connection between the impression and the feeling itself. Before he has completely felt the impression he has begun to think what it is, nay, how to express it. He has his eye always on his audience, and is always directly addressing someone. And this is the root difference between the poet strictly so called

and the orator.[1] Poetry is a record of feeling; oratory is an appeal, based, of course, on emotional experience, but meant to excite feeling. It is an address to the feeling of the audience. Great oratory, and Byron's is superbly great, forces a contact between the emotions of the audience and the emotions of the speaker. Poetry displays its own heart. Oratory tears open the heart of the listener.

If we look at Byron's poetry from this point of view, we shall find that, just in so much as it is deficient in the pure inner quality of the most truthful poetry, it is proficient in the more external quality of oratory. Before Sappho's verses can mean anything to any one, there is necessary some retirement to the sessions of thought. But Byron as he runs along, pointing his effects, educes a sympathetic understanding. Great oratory depends just as much as the greatest poetry upon emotion; nor is it correct to say that the one depends upon the emotion of the hearer, the other on that of the speaker. No orator ever aroused emotion without himself experiencing emotion. What it is correct to say is that the orator is thinking primarily, not of what he feels himself, but of how he can affect others. His feeling is necessary to him, but it is no more necessary

[1] 'Poetry and eloquence are both alike the expression or utterance of feeling. But if we may be excused the antithesis, we should say that eloquence is heard, poetry is *over*heard. Eloquence supposes an audience; the peculiarity of poetry appears to us to lie in the poet's utter unconsciousness of a listener. Poetry is feeling confessing itself to itself, in moments of solitude, and embodying itself in symbols which are the nearest possible representations of the feeling in the exact shape in which it exists in the poet's mind. Eloquence is feeling pouring itself out to other minds, courting their sympathy, or endeavouring to influence their belief or move them to passion or to action.'—Mill, *Poetry and its Varieties*.

than his tongue. The feeling of the orator, to employ a bold figure, is the tongue of his heart; it is eloquent.

How easy it is to draw distinctions, and how difficult to make them. The orator is not occupied in telling people how he feels, but in getting people to feel with him. For this reason his chief enemy is inattention, and since it is, he *must* deal in contrast and antithesis, he *must* deal in broad effects:—

> 'When Nero perished by the justest doom
> Which ever the destroyer yet destroyed.'

Nero had little to do with Hesperus, but he points, and points rightly, Byron's moral.

Take, for instance, that moving passage about the Colosseum:—

'And here the buzz of eager nations ran,
In murmur'd pity, or loud-roar'd applause,
As man was slaughter'd by his fellow-man.
And wherefore slaughter'd? wherefore, but because
Such were the bloody Circus' genial laws,
And the imperial pleasure.—Wherefore not?
What matters where we fall to fill the maws
Of worms—on battle-plains or listed spot?
Both are but theatres where the chief actors rot.

I see before me the gladiator lie:
He leans upon his hand—his manly brow
Consents to death, but conquers agony,
And his droop'd head sinks gradually low—
And through his side the last drops, ebbing slow
From the red gash, fall heavy, one by one,
Like the first of a thunder-shower; and now
The arena swims around him—he is gone,
Ere ceased the inhuman shout which hail'd the wretch who won.

He heard it, but he heeded not—his eyes
Were with his heart, and that was far away:
He reck'd not of the life he lost nor prize,
But where his rude hut by the Danube lay,
There were his young barbarians all at play,
There was their Dacian mother—he, their sire,
Butcher'd to make a Roman holiday.'

It is impossible to imagine grander oratory: the disturbed atmosphere, as of a concourse, of the noble introduction; the swift appeal, with outflung arm, to humane sentiment; the invented question and the broad irony. Nothing is perfect, and at the close of the first stanza there is poor writing, but it is immediately followed by the wonderful second stanza so boldly painted, the blood that falls 'like the first of a thunder-shower,' a meretricious but colossal figure that out-Burkes Burke, and then the swift exitus, and the masterly return on the humane mood:—

'Ere ceased the inhuman shout which hail'd the wretch who won.'

There follows a stroke of pure poetry, improved for the purposes of popular appeal by the pathetic explication, the simple home scene, the children, the mother, and then thundering—

'he, their sire,
Butcher'd to make a Roman holiday,'—

the whole pent-up sympathies of the audience gathering to a head in that glut of splendid rage: a hush of wonder and then the whole theatre rising to its feet.

It is magnificent; but it is not the method of poetry. The tomb of Cecilia Metella is another familiar instance:—

'There is a stern round tower of other days,
Firm as a fortress, with its fence of stone,
Such as an army's baffled strength delays,
Standing with half its battlements alone,
And with two thousand years of ivy grown,
The garland of eternity, where wave
The green leaves over all by time o'erthrown;—
What was this tower of strength? within its cave
What treasure lay so lock'd, so hid?—A woman's grave.'

It is not possible to beat this. What art! The stern tower, the reference to martial multitudes, and to the withstood attrition of the years, all to lead to the eternal contrast, the source of human birth and the quiet resistless end.

Just as effective are Waterloo, the address to the Ocean, the falls of Terni, the shipwreck in *Don Juan*, the cup of Samian wine. Nay, just as effective are all those pieces which cannot be praised throughout for their poetical excellence, 'The Dream,' 'She Walks in Beauty'; just as effective is the quality of over-vividness at which we cavilled. This quality of over-vividness is indeed found to be essential.

Such rhetorical merit, the merit of an appeal or an effect, attaches to pieces which have hardly any other, *Manfred contra Mundum*, for instance. This dramatic poem, Byron's defiant exclamation that he can live alone, is, as a whole, nearly unreadable; but the figure lives in the memory like a storm. So with *Cain*, which Arnold amused himself with demonstrating not to be a great philosophical work. *Cain* was not properly comparable with the *De Rerum Natura*; its author did not possess his own view definitely nor see it sufficiently as a whole; had in fact no view; was troubled with the difficulties of Genesis and 'the two principles.' Perhaps in Arnold's day this needed saying, or perhaps it was Arnold's way of saying something else. Yet *Cain* was a remarkable achievement. Obviously not the work of a thinker, nor written from any single standpoint, it occupied itself very effectively in putting posers to the current theology, and it startled the whole of Byron's England as the crack of a stockdriver's whip startles the cattle of the American plains. It was

an actual living polemic of the directest kind, and one might as well object to the *Tale of a Tub* that it was not written by Meredith. Dr. Kennedy's views did not interest Arnold, but they interested Byron. Dr. Kennedy was sitting on the Government benches.

A merit that can inform and give life to whole poems is no light merit, and Byron's oratorical power is so great that he leaves all other English orators standing. We have not to say 'How different from Wordsworth.' We have to say 'How much better than Patrick Henry.' Here is an orator who is moving with the flow, the rush, and the light of poetry.

And how strong and firm is Byron :—

> 'A solitary shriek, the bubbling cry
> Of some strong swimmer in his agony.'

That is as much beyond Macaulay as Shakespeare's plays are beyond Tennyson's. There is here a contained power. How the blows, on this side and on that, heavily fall. He puts his fist through :—

> 'You have the Pyrrhic dance as yet ;[1]
> Where is the Pyrrhic phalanx gone ?'

Byron does not understand war as Burns understands it or Tolstoy, but no such noble expression of the martial instinct as Byron's one line,

> 'Battle's magnificently-stern array,'

is to be found in their human pages. This is to express what the serried ranks are aspiring to feel

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[1] Plato (*Laws*, vii. 816) tells us there were two main classes of dancing—the warlike or Pyrrhic dance, and the dance of peace (τὸ εἰρηνικόν).—E. A. Sonnenschein's *Ideals of Culture.*

about their business. It is to achieve the purpose of the public orator :—

'Minions of splendour shrinking from distress.'

How good it all is, and how impossible to be bettered ![1]

With this power of direct and luminous appeal Byron combines another, the power of sentiment. And this power, though also superseded by a greater power in the highest poetry, is peculiarly of service to an orator. To an orator sentiment is of greater account than feeling, for what is sentiment but feeling displayed? It is not possible to have sentiment without feeling ; it is possible to have feeling without sentiment. You can feel, that is to say, without posing or setting the feeling so as to start a responsive tear. Feeling itself is without consciousness of its effect ; it is direct, poignant, even sometimes unmanly. But the great speaker must exercise control ; from his touches of tenderness there must be a recovery. You move an audience by standing erect. Sometimes, coming where it does, a momentary retrospect is enough :—

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[1] One says so, forgetting Shakespeare, for Shakespeare has sometimes an eloquence that contains more imagination than Byron's :—

'Are all thy conquests, glories, triumphs, spoils,
Shrunk to this little measure.'

The quality that is in this that is not in Byron at his best is a clear magnificence. And just for this reason it would be admired, as Lord Rosebery's eloquence is admired, by any audience ; but it would not move an audience as Byron would.

Shakespeare too, at other times, has oratorical lines that might be Byron's :

'Cowards die many times before their death.'

But Shakespeare's power of writing constantly like this was crowded out by his power of writing very differently.

'I have a passion for the name of Mary,
For once it was a magic name to me.'

Sometimes there is a deliberate balancing :—

'Though wit may flash from fluent lips, and mirth distract the breast,
Through midnight hours that yield no more their former hope of rest;
'Tis but as ivy-leaves around the ruined turret wreath,
All green and wildly fresh without, but worn and grey beneath.'

Or less obviously, but more finely :—

'There 's not a joy the world can give like that it takes away,
When the glow of early thought declines in feeling's dull decay;
'Tis not on youth's smooth cheek the blush alone, which fades so fast,
But the tender bloom of heart is gone, ere youth itself be past.'

Without the precision of the opening lines that last beautiful one would sound sentimental.

Sometimes too, when the depth of the feeling overmasters, there is compression of the lips :—

'The fire that on my bosom preys
Is lone as some volcanic isle;
No torch is kindled at its blaze—
A funeral pile!'

Byron's command over verse is considerable, such as to afford him free opportunity of developing his sentiment—a sentiment which for richness and warmth of generosity stands alone. Usually a sentimental writer has something that, however charming, is essentially feminine in his nature, something Longfellowish. But Byron is not unmanned; his display is like the first drops of a thunder shower, and it no more detracts from his dignity than the cloud's bursting detracts from that of heaven. As a poet of

sentiment he has a range, to which he never otherwise attains :—

"'Tis sweet to hear the watch-dog's honest bark
Bay deep-mouth'd welcome as we draw near home ;
'Tis sweet to know there is an eye will mark
Our coming, and look brighter when we come ;
'Tis sweet to be awaken'd by the lark,
Or lull'd by falling waters ; sweet the hum
Of bees, the voice of girls, the song of birds,
The lisp of children and their earliest words.

Sweet is the vintage, when the showering grapes
In Bacchanal profusion reel to earth. . . .'

One can think of the cradle and yet clink one's glass.

'Tis sweet to win, no matter how, one's laurels,
By blood or ink ; 'tis sweet to put an end
To strife ; 'tis sometimes sweet to have our quarrels,
Particularly with a tiresome friend :
Sweet is old wine in bottles, ale in barrels ;
Dear is the helpless creature we defend
Against the world ; and dear the schoolboy spot
We ne'er forget, though there we are forgot.'

There is nothing of the *littérateur* here ; it is the man talking to men. In truth, there is both a robustness and an orange glow in these sentimental passages which quiver on the brink of tears. They move like the panorama of sunset, full of that fluent reference to all things that distinguishes great-hearted talk. No writer gives you the same sense of coming in contact with a living flesh-and-blood personality. The personality disclosed in Wordsworth's poems is an inner personality. If you met him he would not be like his poems ; but Byron, at his best, has no singing

mantle to put on. He has not, like Shakespeare, a secret imaginative world. He is no poetry fellow :—

> 'My boat is on the shore,
> And my bark is on the sea ;
> But, before I go, Tom Moore,
> Here's a double health to thee !'

That might be trolled out in a mellow voice at the banquet of social joy. You can see him lifting his cup, the whole head, with the shining eyes, sparkling with animation.

It is the charm of contact. What Byron writes is near the summit of that perfection to which a purely external poetry can attain.

EMERSON

'THE emotionalisation of knowledge,' says Mr. Hudson in his *Introduction to the Study of Literature*, is inevitably a slow and gradual process; but meanwhile, one measure of a poet's greatness as a thinker is his ability to perceive the possibility of it.'

Principal Shairp heads a chapter of his essay *On the Poetic Interpretation of Nature*, 'Will Science put out Poetry?' and in the copy in my hands Professor Nichol has answered this question with the genial note, 'Yes, for a hundred years.' Thirty-four of these years have gone, and Poetry has not yet seriously concentrated upon the task of the twentieth century. The novel nature of the task, and the general consciousness of a task being there, has for the most part merely damped the ardour of poets. Our love songs have not of late been good, because we have heard, faintly, a call to sing of the new interests. Sporadically in the last hundred years much has been attempted by great men, by Emerson, by Arnold, and by Meredith. Much too has been achieved, yet 'the emotionalisation of knowledge is inevitably a slow and gradual process,' and what Wordsworth said remains true: 'If the labours of Men of science should ever create any material revolution, direct or indirect, in our condition, and in the impressions which we habitually receive, the Poet will sleep then no more than at

present; he will be ready to follow the steps of the Man of science, not only in those general indirect effects, but he will be at his side, carrying sensation into the midst of the objects of the science itself.'

But this time has not yet arrived: the conclusions of philosophy, science, and criticism are not yet any necessary part of the general mind—nay, more, the thinker himself seldom apprehends these conclusions emotionally. The first step is that he should do so; the next step is that all should do so.

Emerson, the forerunner in everything modern, is the forerunner in this. His poetry is to be judged not solely for its own excellence, but for its worth as a factor in an intellectual development that will be the ripest birth of the coming time. Then Poetry will cease to confine herself to the chronicling of action and the topics of Love and Doubt: she will expend her emotion on her inner Faith. A new Dante and a new Milton will arise to sing the beliefs of the new man.

'To point forward and to help in the accomplishment' of this is the true work of Emerson's poems. This it is which gives them a character of their own, which makes them difficult and, to those who run away from modern life, even uninteresting. It is so much easier to luxuriate in the imagery of 'The Blessed Damozel.'

The duty of the literary critic is not, therefore, to praise Emerson for occasionally writing poems on more general patterns. He does so, but this is not his chief merit. It is not his chief merit, but the merit of these occasional poems of Emerson's is at times extremely high. In the poetry of quietism, of gentle and

resigned feeling, and of feeling observation, he has left occasional work which is not of its kind surpassable; and in a poetry of a lower order, a poetry whose merit is rhetorical, his occasional successes are so brilliant that he bulks large in the list of quotations familiar to the literate.

As a rhetorician Emerson has the supreme merit of not being rhetorical; I mean, that the balance of the saying is with the speaker. In Byron's rhetoric you feel that it is all, or if not all, chiefly in the address. He is thinking much more of the people he is addressing than of the thing said, with the consequence that Byron's rhetoric is never *for long* not wild. The target is hit, but there is a shower of arrows, many of which fly wide. In Emerson's rhetoric, though the thing is put in the most telling way possible, you feel there has been a preliminary and conscientious struggle to define the thing. It is legitimate rhetoric, the wit of sense:—

'Pay ransom to the owner,
And fill the bag to the brim.
Who is the owner? The slave is owner,
And ever was. Pay him.'

What a wrestle with the opposing argument went before that lightning throw!

'So nigh is grandeur to our dust,
So near is God to man,
When Duty whispers low, *Thou must*,
The youth replies, *I can*.'

One could not say that but as the result of a laborious moral experience. Sometimes it is a long pondering on history that has preceded:—

'For He that worketh high and wise,
Nor pauses in his plan,
Will take the sun out of the skies
Ere freedom out of man.

At times, too, there is a higher virtue. You are hardly conscious that you are being addressed, so much does the poet seem to be thinking aloud :—

> 'Though love repine, and reason chafe,
> There came a voice without reply,—
> "'Tis man's perdition to be safe,
> When for the truth he ought to die."'

It carries much further than Byron at his best :—

> 'I laugh at the lore and the pride of man,
> At the sophist schools, and the learned clan ;
> For what are they all, in their high conceit,
> When man in the bush with God may meet?'

It does not merely convince one, it sets one thinking. In the hymn for the Concord Monument, rhetoric reaches its final expression :—

> 'Here once the embattled farmers stood,
> And fired the shot heard round the world.'

That is to glorify the fact without boasting. In its square shoulders it has the unaggressive dignity of defence, and pays at once a pointed and a just tribute to America, to Freedom, and to Man.[1]

Besides this poetry, very easily understood and with a broad moral appeal, Emerson has another poetry more definitely poetic, less intellectual and more emotional.

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[1] Cowper's

> 'Regions Cæsar never knew
> Thy Posterity shall sway,'

is fine too, the finest thing in the literature of Imperialism. It is fine because of the prospect in it, by which it is separated from the vainglorious celebration of present achievement. But put it beside Emerson and it is but a prophetic boast, a thing of glitter.

It must be premised, however, that on typically emotional subjects—in a typical love poetry, for example—success does not attend his steps. On emotional subjects he has no power of emotion. These poems often are too thin in sentiment ('Eva'); often the poet talks round his subject and is content with a succession of statements; he has no sufficient command of music, no sufficient facility of rejection of unemotional images:—

'O'er ten thousand, thousand acres,
Goes light the nimble zephyr;
The Flowers—tiny sect of Shakers—
Worship him ever.'

Even in the best of these emotional pieces there is a sense of intellectual effort:—

'When the redbird spread his sable wing,
And showed his side of flame;
When the rosebud ripened to the rose,
In both I read thy name.'

It is pretty, but it is made pretty. Those who find a stately charm in everything Emerson writes will find that charm still in these love pieces, but charm of magic they have none.

At times, too, when something observed has stirred in him a transient but very real emotion, he disturbs the emotional effect by explaining or trying to explain. Take this beautiful little piece to the American wild flower the Rhodora:—

'In May, when sea-winds pierced our solitudes,
I found the fresh Rhodora in the woods,
Spreading its leafless blooms in a damp nook,
To please the desert and the sluggish brook
The purple petals, fallen in the pool,
Made the black water with their beauty gay;
Here might the red-bird come his plumes to cool,
And court the flower that cheapens his array.

Rhodora! Let the sages ask thee why
This charm is wasted on the earth and sky,
Why thou wert there, O rival of the rose!
I never thought to ask, I never knew;
But, in my simple ignorance, suppose
The self-same Power that brought me there brought you.'

This is not to be placed beside Wordsworth's daffodils, but it is simple and affecting, and there is a beautiful ascension of emotion from the freshness of the opening line to the religious sincerity of the last. I have placed the real Rhodora in a footnote.[1] The inserted couple of lines explain nothing, and if they did, they furnish a sudden descent to the level road of the intellect.

For all that, on occasion, and on subjects where the appropriate emotion is a gentle one, Emerson can write with a clear, fresh grace that belongs to him alone. These triumphs are occasional, but they are triumphs, as when he speaks of the mists

'Gracing the rich man's wood and lake,
His park where amber mornings break'

(a phrase that you would have said was Tennyson's, except that Tennyson would have said 'the amber morn'), or as when he speaks of the free life of the wood:—

'I am going to my own hearth-stone,
Bosomed in yon green hills alone,—

---

[1] In the text given I have taken a liberty of omission, and the poem really ends as follows:—

'Rhodora, if the sages ask thee why
This charm is wasted on the earth and sky,
Tell them, dear, that if eyes were made for seeing,
Then Beauty is its own excuse for being;
Why thou wert there, O rival of the rose!' etc.

A secret nook in a pleasant land,
Whose groves the frolic fairies planned;
Where arches green, the livelong day,
Echo the blackbird's roundelay.'

Here is a passage that might have stepped straight out of the pages of a seventeenth-century quietist:—

'When the forest shall mislead me,
When the night and morning lie,
When sea and land refuse to feed me,
'Twill be time enough to die;
Then will yet my mother yield
A pillow in her greenest field,
Nor the June flowers scorn to cover
The clay of their departed lover.'

And here is a vignette with more of panorama and open air in it than was ever confined in a drawing:—

'Many hamlets sought I then,
Many farms of mountain men.
Rallying round a parish steeple
Nestle warm the highland people,
Coarse and boisterous, yet mild,
Strong as giant, slow as child,
Smoking in a squalid room
Where yet the westland breezes come.'

There are only two emotional poems of Emerson's which may be said to be successful as a whole: the 'Threnody,' which in a low quiet tone is very noble, and 'May Day'; but in both, and notably in 'May Day,' the second half of which is a falling off, parts are better than the rest. The 'Threnody' was composed under the influence of Emerson's deepest affliction, the loss of his darling son. The depths of that serene nature, generally superior to life and its accidents, for once were stirred:—

'O child of paradise,
Boy who made dear his father's home,
In whose deep eyes
Men read the welfare of the times to come,
I am too much bereft.
The world dishonoured thou hast left.
O truth's and nature's costly lie!
O trusted broken prophecy!
O richest fortune sourly crossed!
Born for the future, to the future lost!'

Or, as he writes in a strain of imaginative clarity, the resigned mind surrendering itself to the dream of things, and therefore to the contemplation of the dream's continuance :—

'And whither now, my truant wise and sweet,
O, whither tend thy feet?
I had the right, few days ago,
Thy steps to watch, thy place to know;
How have I forfeited the right?
Hast thou forgot me in a new delight?'

He paints the dainty picture :—

'Ah, vainly do these eyes recall
The school-march, each day's festival,
When every morn my bosom glowed
To watch the convoy on the road;
The babe in willow wagon closed,
With rolling eyes and face composed;
With children forward and behind,
Like Cupids studiously inclined;
And he the chieftain paced beside,
The centre of the troop allied,
With sunny face of sweet repose,
To guard the babe from fancied foes.
The little captain innocent
Took the eye with him as he went;
Each village senior paused to scan
And speak the lovely caravan.

From the window I look out
To mark thy beautiful parade,
Stately marching in cap and coat
To some tune by fairies played.'[1]

A similar delicacy and a more unrestrained emotion inform the 'Ode on May Day,' the precursor of much that Meredith has written about Nature, the music being struck, however, on a bell of higher note. For the first time in English poetry man is in contact with the outer air, undisturbed by a breath from the meditative or religious study :—

'As if time brought a new relay
Of shining virgins every May.'

The invitation fans the cheek :—

'Up and away! where haughty woods
Front the liberated floods:
We will climb the broad-backed hills,
Hear the uproar of their joy';

or mark where

'The million-handed painter pours
Opal hues and purple dye;
Azaleas flush the island floors,
And the tints of heaven reply.'

---

[1] Beside this stately grief Cowper's famous passage is from a moral standpoint very poor. It is surcharged with a sense of clamant personal loss, and even grudges the unfeeling new generation the playroom that was his.

'Where once we dwelt our name is heard no more,
Children not thine have trod my nursery floor;
And where the gardener Robin, day by day,
Drew me to school along the public way,
Delighted with my bauble coach, and wrapp'd
In scarlet mantle warm, and velvet cap,
'Tis now become a history little known,
That once we call'd the pastoral house our own.'

But how inexpressibly more affecting! The truth is, Emerson has too fine a nature to be supremely great as an emotional poet.

The wonderful opening is the sign and herald of a new poetry :—

'Daughter of Heaven and Earth, coy Spring,
With sudden passion languishing,
Maketh all things softly smile,
Painteth pictures mile on mile,
Holds a cup with cowslip-wreaths,
Whence a smokeless incense breathes.
Girls are peeling the sweet willow,
Poplar white, and Gilead-tree,
And troops of boys
Shouting with whoop and hilloa,
And hip, hip three times three.[1]
The air is full of whistlings bland ;
What was that I heard
Out of the hazy land?
Harp of the wind or song of bird,
Or clapping of shepherd's hands,
Or vagrant booming of the air,
Voice of a meteor lost in day?
Such tidings of the starry sphere
Can this elastic air convey.
Or haply 'twas the cannonade
Of the pent and darkened lake,
Cooled by the pendent mountain's shade,
Whose deeps, till beams of noonday break,
Afflicted moan, and latest hold
Even unto May the iceberg cold.
Was it a squirrel's pettish bark,
Or clarionet of jay? or hark,
Where yon wedged line the Nestor leads,
Steering north with raucous cry
Through tracts and provinces of sky,
Every night alighting down

[1] 'Girls are peeling the sweet willow,
Poplar white, and Gilead-tree,
And troops of boys
Shouting with whoop and hilloa,
And hip, hip three times three.'

How succulent it is !

In new landscapes of romance,
Where darkling feed the clamorous clans
By lonely lakes to men unknown.
Come the tumult whence it will,
Voice of sport, or rush of wings,
It is a sound, it is a token
That the marble sleep is broken,
And a change has passed on things.'

This is emotion stirred by the fact, and entering into the fact and colouring it emotionally. The fact here, it is true, is a fact observed. Greater difficulties are in Emerson's road when he comes to deal with the facts or conclusions of the intellect. To turn them into emotion is indeed hard, and yet this is precisely for what Emerson as a poet stands. He offers to us more intellectual matter emotionally apprehended than any poet who preceded him. He is not always successful; often he is contented with the mere statement of his conclusion, or finds it impossible to state his conclusion in any but the barest intellectual terms. The verse—

'One thing is forever good;
That one thing is Success,—
Dear to the Eumenides,
And to all the heavenly brood';

or the question—

'Why Nature loves the number five,
And why the star-form she repeats';

or what he has to say of 'Letters,' or of Freedom in 'Voluntaries,' or of the fortunate Guy in the poem of that name, or of 'Berrying,' or of the revolutions in the generations in 'Woodnotes,'—

'The lord is the peasant that was,
The peasant the lord that shall be';—

with all these Poetry has had nothing to do. They may be a little more neatly stated than most prose statements, but they are prose statements. Of such statements Emerson's poems are far too full; they make up a solid half of his nominal poetry, and the wisdom they contain does not justify their numerous intrusion. This is a fault, and one of the gravest; but it is not one from which the intellectual poet can easily free himself. The poetry of the intellect is almost bound to be diffusive; the reasoning power is prone to amble, and does its work by *not* being always at white heat.

Even when he is dealing with a profound thought —for example, a thought running through all his writings—

> 'We cannot learn the cipher
> That's writ upon our cell;
> Stars help us by a mystery
> Which we could never spell,'

he is, as here, often contented with the mere setting out of the thought. This mystery of which Emerson speaks—we do not feel its mysteriousness in reading the verse which speaks of it. Here is not an intellectual truth emotionally, but an emotional truth intellectually apprehended. The stars help us by a mystery, but Emerson does not.

It is curious to notice in his poems the interaction of two separate desires, the constant effort of the emotion to make poetry out of intellectual matter, and the cool persistent claim of the intellect to set the thing fully out. 'The Sphinx' contains his central doctrine, his doctrine of the infinite nature of the soul, perhaps never more clearly stated than in this verse:—

'The heavens that now draw him
With sweetness untold,
Once found,—for new heavens
He spurneth the old.'

But this is not poetry. It is a singularly clear statement of the doctrine, by means of the metaphor that is at once most easily understood and nearest to hand. It is also a statement of sufficient width. When he wrote it he was thinking how to state it. But a little further on, the idea resting in his mind, the emotion takes fire :—

'Have I a lover
Who is noble and free?—
I would he were nobler
Than to love me.'[1]

This is not as explicit, and would not inform a general reader as carefully, but it sets alight a contagious emotion. Similarly in 'Merlin' he makes the scientific statement, generalised from much observation, that

'Balance-loving Nature
Made all things in pairs.'

The student of natural history understands that and wishes to hear no more, but eight lines further down Emerson goes on :—

'Hands to hands, and feet to feet,
In one body grooms and brides;
Eldest rite, two married sides
In every mortal meet.'

The thing begins to glow.

---

[1] And so in the essay on Nature (*Essays*, 2nd Series): 'The accepted and betrothed lover has lost the wildest charm of his maiden in her acceptance of him.'

Per contra, on occasion he first seizes the thing poetically, and then stumbles back into prose :—

> 'I thought the sparrow's note from heaven,
> Singing at dawn on the alder bough ;
> I brought him home, in his nest, at even ;
> He sings the song, but it pleases not now,'

but he must attempt an explanation :—

> 'For I did not bring home the river and sky ;—
> He sang to my ear,—they sang to my eye.'

And now he has spoilt it. Not solely because he has given the reason ; our disillusionment has another cause : we at once reject the reason as insufficient. That is only partially true. There were many reasons, and even if all the causes of difference were exhaustively stated, they would not explain the *sense* of difference. It is strange that Emerson, who so constantly tells us this, should err in this way, but in this way he is constantly erring.

With these faults admitted, Emerson is often much more successful than here. If he were not, I should not now, and for my present purpose, be discussing his poetry. He does often succeed in emotionalising matter very hard to emotionalise.

But before discussing his occasional but very numerous successes, there is still a further distinction to be drawn. At times he stops short of emotion and is content with crystallisation. To this department of his activity belong the immortal epigrams :—

> 'For gods delight in gods,
> And thrust the weak aside ;
> To him who scorns their charities,
> Their arms fly open wide' ;

the reply of the squirrel to the mountain,—

> 'If I cannot carry forests on my back,
> Neither can you crack a nut';

the recognition of the reign of material interests,—

> 'The horseman serves the horse,
> The neatherd serves the neat,
> The merchant serves the purse,
> The eater serves his meat;
> 'Tis the day of the chattel,
> Web to weave, and corn to grind;
> Things are in the saddle,
> And ride mankind';

the too optimistic pronouncement,—[1]

> 'Heartily know,
> When half-gods go,
> The gods arrive';

the testimonial to social nature,—

> 'Man was made of social earth,
> Child and brother from his birth';

the enthronement of the humane sentiment,—

> 'Fear not, then, thou child infirm,
> There's no god dare wrong a worm';

the contemptuous summary of the worth of material things,—

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[1] Too optimistic; for nothing is easier than to destroy without building up. What is true is that you cannot build up without destroying.

> 'When the gods arrive
> The half-gods go,'

but this would not have tickled the ear of the world.

'Gold and iron are good
To buy iron and gold.'[1]

In all these there is no emotion; the thought is crystallised, but there is no feeling suffusing the thought. It is the same where he is not epigrammatic but merely concentrated, as in the mountain's dismissal of the cit:—

'Then, at last, I let him down
Once more into his dapper town,
To chatter, frightened, to his clan,
And forget me if he can';

or when Emerson describes existence,—

'Out of sleeping a waking,
Out of waking a sleep;
Life death overtaking;
Deep underneath deep';

or in the pregnant counsel to the man who would open the woods with the memory of a book,—

'Leave all thy pedant lore apart;
God hid the whole world in thy heart';

---

[1] Once or twice there are epigrams expressly written as epigrams:

'The sinful painter drapes his goddess warm,
Because she still is naked, being dressed:
The godlike sculptor will not so deform
Beauty, which limbs and flesh enough invest.'

He is appropriately and singularly successful in translating epigrams:

'On prince or bride no diamond stone
Half so gracious ever shone,
As the light of enterprise
Beaming from a young man's eyes.'

Which is so happy it might be Emerson's own.

'EPITAPH.
Bethink, poor heart, what bitter kind of jest
Mad Destiny this tender stripling played;
For a warm breast of maiden to his breast,
She laid a slab of marble on his head.'

Which plays with more emotion than most of Emerson's own epigrams.

or where he speaks of his boy's education,—

> 'I taught thy heart beyond the reach
> Of ritual, bible, or of speech';

or refers to those

> 'Swains that live in happiness,
> And do well because they please';[1]

or sums up the beautiful experiences of a day,—

> 'Thus far to-day your favours reach,
> O fair, appeasing presences!
> Ye taught my lips a single speech,
> And a thousand silences.'

It is in such passages that the calm, penetrating intellect finds itself—finds itself in this often sudden but unhurried concentration of aphoristic thought; and this calm, penetrating intellect is Emerson. It is not the whole of Emerson, but it is especially himself. Weakness in this very Emersonian habit of crystallisation, of course, there is. One patent defect of it is, that as there is in it no emotion to generalise or to intensify experience, it is apt to run away into over-particularisation. It is apt to state too definitely, even to state indefiniteness definitely:—

> 'As sunbeams stream through liberal space,
> And nothing jostle or displace,
> So waved the pine-tree through my thought,
> And fanned the dreams it never brought.'

---

[1] Cp. Wordsworth's

> 'who, in love and truth,
> Where no misgiving is, rely
> Upon the genial sense of youth':

where Wordsworth has not merely observed, as Emerson, but has sympathetically felt the fact. The more exact parallel is

> 'Glad hearts, without reproach or blot,
> Who do thy work and know it not.'

But this is no better than Emerson's.

The dreams were in the mind of the percipient, and not brought from outside. Nothing could be simpler, but the definiteness of the negation disturbs the attentive mind and affects it like a volte-face.

The other weakness is that which we have been considering—the tendency, or rather the practice, to be contented with the statement without feeling. In a little thing called 'Eros' Emerson speaks of the sufficiency of Love :—

> 'The sense of the world is short,—
> Long and various the report,—
> To love and be beloved ;
> Men and gods have not outlearned it ;
> And, how oft soe'er they've turned it,
> 'Twill not be improved.'

This is a simple thought concisely stated, so concisely that the last three lines are unnecessary ; whereas in FitzGerald's

> 'A Book of Verses underneath the Bough,
> A Jug of Wine, a Loaf of Bread—and Thou
> Beside me singing in the Wilderness—
> Oh, Wilderness were Paradise enow !'[1]

the simple thought is sublimised. Between Emerson's conciseness and FitzGerald's elevation there lies the whole difference between a thought that is merely perceived and a thought that is felt to be true.

And it is this which constitutes the difference between these Emersonian verses and the Emersonian poetry of which I am about to speak. The contrast

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[1] Emerson is not very happy with Omar Chiam, as he calls him—

> 'Each spot where tulips prank their state
> Has drunk the life-blood of the great ;
> The violets yon field which stain
> Are moles of beauties time hath slain' ;

which recalls other verses.

obviously is not so sharp. FitzGerald's quatrain is an outpouring of emotion upon an emotional subject. The intellect is not employed at all. But of the poetry to which I now proceed to advert, the whole point is that it is primarily and, when primarily, exclusively occupied with the subjects of the intellectual perception. I have not now to deal with a purely emotional poetry. Of such of Emerson's poetry as has a primary emotional appeal, and it is very limited in quantity, I have already spoken, just as I have concluded speaking of that poetry of Emerson's which makes no emotional appeal and pretends to none. What remains to discuss is Emerson's power of apprehending emotionally matter that is intellectual. His power in this respect is much greater than is commonly supposed, since it is exercised not continuously but only here and there.

It is possible, if one is to confine oneself to whole poems, to represent Emerson as an emotional poet by a reference to two long poems, the 'Threnody' and 'May Day.' To do so, one has to make allowance for some roughness of representation; but it is possible. It is easily possible to represent Emerson as a poet who makes no appeal to emotion, by single poems and plenty of them. But, if one is to speak of him as a poet at once intellectual and emotional, one has to confine oneself to passages, often quite short passages, sometimes longer but never of very great length :—

> 'Set not thy foot on graves :
> Hear what wine and roses say.'

That is Emerson at his best. There is probably no one else who could have written it. A whole philosophy of life and a cheerful one—not a luxurious one, the negative is too grave for that—is expressed in two

lines, and it is expressed feelingly, but the poem as a whole does not come off.

Again a discursive poem, always about to clinch and never clinching, ends or almost ends with this immensity :—

> 'Over me soared the eternal sky,
> Full of light and of deity.'

In this division of Emerson's poetry are many passages in 'Woodnotes,' the lineal ancestor of Meredith's 'Woods of Westermain.' To the true lover of Nature the life of the woodland appeals as possessing a various activity, the varied spirit of which he can feel :—

> 'He saw the partridge drum in the woods ;
> He heard the woodcock's evening hymn ;
> He found the tawny thrush's broods ;
> And the shy hawk did wait for him.'

The creatures are not afraid of him who 'foots at peace with mouse or worm,' and if he is not afraid he need not be afraid of them :—

> 'Whoso walketh in solitude,
> And inhabiteth the wood, . . .
> On him the light of star and moon
> Shall fall with purer radiance down ;
> All constellations of the sky
> Shed their virtue through his eye.
> Him Nature giveth for defence
> His formidable innocence' ;

or as in another place it is expressed more explicitly :—

> 'The timid it concerns to ask their way,
> And fear what foe in caves and swamps can stray,
> To make no step until the event is known,
> And ills to come as evils past bemoan.
> Not so the wise ; no coward watch he keeps
> To spy what danger on his pathway creeps ;

Go where he will, the wise man is at home,[1]
His hearth the earth,—his hall the azure dome ;
Where his clear spirit leads him, there's his road,
By God's own light illumined and foreshowed.'

The underlying law of the wood, as the alert intelligence observing and adding perceives, is the law of 'going on.' The ceaseless process of life continues, and if one lends one's ear attentively one can hear, amid the myriad variety, one tune :—

'Hearken ! Hearken !
If thou wouldst know the mystic song
Chanted when the sphere was young. . . .
To the open ear it sings
Sweet the genesis of things,
Of tendency through endless ages,
Of star-dust, and star-pilgrimages,
Of rounded worlds, of space and time,
Of the old flood's subsiding slime,
Of chemic matter, force, and form,
Of poles and powers, cold, wet, and warm :
The rushing metamorphosis,
Dissolving all that fixture is,
Melts things that be to things that seem,
And solid nature to a dream.'

And of this 'metamorphosis,' of this 'tendency through endless ages' working in beauty towards that higher beauty which is good, man feels himself a part. Nature is eloquent to man, and 'a ray of relation' comes to him from everything that breathes :—

'The youth reads omens where he goes,
And speaks all languages the rose.
The wood-fly mocks with tiny noise
The far halloo of human voice ;
The perfumed berry on the spray
Smacks of faint memories far away.

[1] 'Go where he will, the wise man is at home.' If one were asked where that line occurred, one would say 'The Happy Warrior.'

A subtle chain of countless rings
The next unto the farthest brings,
And, striving to be man, the worm
Mounts through all the spires of form.'[1]

It is because he *is* part of the evolutionary process, the tendency, a process never completed and inexhaustible. Death itself is a part of this process, and decay a fuel that serves to nourish, or, in Meredith's words, to brighten, the fire of renewal. Emerson's figure is more of the open :—

'No ray is dimmed, no atom worn,
My oldest force is good as new,
And the fresh rose on yonder thorn
Gives back the bending heavens in dew.'

To the modern man mountain scenery has an especial appeal. It formed and strengthened the character of Wordsworth. In comparing the influence of scenery upon the shape of the mind one has but to think of Tennyson's youth spent on the edge of the Lincolnshire fens, and how he 'used to stand when a boy on the sandbuilt ridge at Mablethorpe and think that it was the spine-bone of the world.' In such scenery the adolescent is alone with the Universe ; there is nothing but himself and stars and sky. But against this beckoning horizon of vague there is set, in a wholly flat country, the distinctness of such objects as there are. In 'Mariana in the Moated Grange,' the cries of

[1] 'May Day.' Elsewhere Emerson has another pregnant phrase for the doctrine of Evolution :—

'And the poor grass shall plot and plan
What it will do when it is man.'—'Bacchus.'

animals, and the trees, become more definite than the landscape. Tennyson is distinguished as a poet by a peculiar niceness of observation joined to a sense of vastness. He sees the pattern on the dresses of his ladies, but beyond this bright world there is the deep. Compare in 'Mariana' the effect of the waste places and the distinctness of the detail of life against them, with Wordsworth's shepherds, moving like Greenland giants against the splendid definition of the mountain. To Wordsworth's familiarity with mountain scenery is to be ascribed his delight in the peak, the top, the finishing; there is to be ascribed to it that solidity and restfulness which is in the character of his poems. In Tennyson, who was so much taken up with life, there is a distinct mystic vein. Wordsworth's sense of mystery has nothing elusive about it. It leads from reality to reality. The reason is given in poetry by Emerson when he thus addresses the mountain Monadnoc :—

> 'Thou imagest the stable good
> For which we all our lifetime grope,
> In shifting form the formless mind,
> And though the substance us elude,
> We in thee the shadow find.'

The mountain gives stability to life, and is necessary to exclude from man's constant sight the vast infinite, and yet this infinite, mirrored in space, is ever and again whispering a home-song in his ear :—

> 'Daily the bending skies solicit man,
> The seasons chariot him from this exile,
> The rainbow hours bedeck his glowing chair,
> The storm-winds urge the heavy weeks along,
> Suns haste to set, that so remoter lights
> Beckon the wanderer to his vaster home.'

Man's body is 'an engine whose motive power is a soul,' and because it is so both Finite and Infinite speak to him in turn. He is immersed in terrestrial affairs, when suddenly

> 'a sunset-touch
> A fancy from a flower-bell, someone's death,
> A chorus-ending from Euripides,'[1]

and he breathes the air of another sphere.

> 'Sometimes the airy synod bends,
> And the mighty choir descends,
> And the brains of men thenceforth,
> In crowded and in still resorts,
> Teem with unwonted thoughts:
> As, when a shower of meteors
> Cross the orbit of the earth,
> And, lit by fringent air,
> Blaze near and far,
> Mortals deem the planets bright
> Have slipped their sacred bars,
> And the lone seaman all the night
> Sails, astonished, amid stars.'

These emotions, of which these passages speak, are not, some may say, difficult to poeticalise. The religion of the modern man may not be a definite religion, still it is a religion, and all religion is emotional.

The answer is supplied by the rarity of the occasions on which it has been done. Not to say too much is the most difficult art, and these passages depend for their verity upon this art.

But Emerson can poeticalise things harder still; he can poeticalise politics; for example, the working creed of Liberalism:—

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[1] 'Bishop Blougram's Apology.'

'God said, I am tired of kings,
I suffer them no more;
Up to my ear the morning brings
The outrage of the poor.'[1]

Characterisation, too, yields to this power of his. Take this passage, descriptive at once of the attraction of the gipsy life to the gipsies, and of their claim to live the true life of the planet, which is out of doors:—

'The wild air bloweth in our lungs,
The keen stars twinkle in our eyes,
The birds give us our wily tongues,
The panther in our dances flies.'

If this is not poetry, what is poetry; and what town-dweller after this does not see a gipsy with a kind of forlorn respect?

'The wild air bloweth in our lungs.'

Nothing as fine as that, of course, can be said on so thin a subject as 'The Humble-Bee,' 'yellow-breeched philosopher'; but the whole life of the bee is sympathetically presented:—

'Burly, dozing humble-bee,
Where thou art is clime for me.

---

[1] Or equally beautifully of the undefeatable Freedom—

'Who gives to seas and sunset skies
Their unspent beauty of surprise.'

Emerson is telling of a memorable defeat:—

'The Cossack eats Poland,
Like stolen fruit;
Her last noble is ruined,
Her last poet mute:
Straight into double band
The victors divide;
Half for freedom strike and stand;—
The astonished Muse finds thousands at her side.'

Let them sail for Porto Rique,
Far-off heats through seas to seek ;
I will follow thee alone,
Thou animated torrid-zone !
Zigzag steerer, desert cheerer,
Let me chase thy waving lines :
Keep me nearer, me thy hearer,
Singing over shrubs and vines.'

There is presented here something of the intoxication of freedom which belongs to any life preoccupied with its own business and indifferent to all else. Human life, too, affords moments like that, when we 'float at pleasure through all Nature,' moments when we seem to have drunk wine 'which never grew in the belly of the grape.' But this human intoxication reaches higher than the bee's ; the mind subject to it is not merely free to attend to its own business but to that of every one, to remould the world nearer to its desire. It is then, when the imagination soars, everything seems in harmony, all obstacles fall away, the struggles of the spirit in a material environment, death and time. One's step is once more elastic, and one feels as one felt in the first waking rapture of the boy. With what propriety does Emerson call to this Bacchus of the soul to

'Refresh the faded tints,
Recut the aged prints,
And write my old adventures with the pen
Which on the first day drew,
Upon the tablets blue,
The dancing Pleiads and eternal men.'

One's youth is lost, and with it the limitless creative daring of fancy. Yet to the seeing eye life itself discloses itself as wonderful. Fancy cannot conceive a

beauty rarer than that which to Seyd, the true poet, opens everywhere :—

'Was never form and never face
So sweet to Seyd as only grace
Which did not slumber like a stone,
But hovered gleaming and was gone.
Beauty chased he everywhere,
In flame, in storm, in clouds of air.
He smote the lake to feed his eye
With the beryl beam of the broken wave ;
He flung in pebbles well to hear[1]
The moment's music which they gave.'

The true poet is aware of this miracle which is life, and walks abroad like a man in a dream, because he is the one man truly alive :—

'He would, yet would not, counsel keep,
But, like a walker in his sleep
With staring eye that seeth none,
Ridiculously up and down
Seeks how he may fitly tell
The heart-o'erlading miracle.'

The true poet is possessed with a sense of this beauty which is everywhere, and where it is not, is :—

'And on his mind at dawn of day
Soft shadows of the evening lay.'

He hears and sees what others do not mark :—

'His music was the south-wind's sigh,
His lamp, the maiden's downcast eye.'

'He should be loved ; he should be hated ' ;—

'A blooming child to children dear,
His heart should palpitate with fear,'

because he alone is conscious (and thus to other men a disturbing influence) that he walks amid mystery.

Life that seems so real is in reality built up of illusion.

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[1] How like the style of Meredith !

We pursue a hope never to catch it, for to come up with it is to recognise it no longer as a hope. When we reach it another airy beckoner leads us on. Indeed, we never realise our ideals; we can reach those we do attain only when we are reaching past them; there are forerunners always for the living spirit, and when he ceases to hear their distant music the man is dead. But how much clearer Emerson makes this by leaving it less clear:—

'Long I followed happy guides,
I could never reach their sides;
Their step is forth, and, ere the day,
Breaks up their leaguer, and away.
Keen my sense, my heart was young,
Right good-will my sinews strung,
But no speed of mine avails
To hunt upon their shining trails.
On and away, their hasting feet
Make the morning proud and sweet;
Flowers they strew,—I catch the scent;
Or tone of silver instrument
Leaves on the wind melodious trace;
Yet I could never see their face.'

The explanation of this is that man's nature is infinite, and that he is (in his finite limitation) at once mocked and fed by infinite ideas. He, the one, is a part of the All, and the one part that can recognise the All. Some breath from the Infinite Nature, as man alone discerns, mixes with the life of everything. There is an Identity, to which men give the highest name, behind each variety, or as Emerson has it in the poem called 'Brahma':—

'If the red slayer think he slays,
Or if the slain think he is slain,
They know well the subtle ways
I keep, and pass, and turn again

Far or forgot to me is near;
Shadow and sunlight are the same;
The vanquished gods to me appear;
And one to me are shame and fame.

They reckon ill who leave me out;
When me they fly, I am the wings;
I am the doubter and the doubt,
And I the hymn the Brahmin sings.'

Is it easy to write like this, or to explain the modern mind to itself? For the key to the modern mind is that it is at once intensely religious and intensely anti-dogmatic :—

'Thou shalt not try
To plant thy shrivelled pedantry
On the shoulders of the sky,'

or, in other words, the modern mind has at once a clear apprehension of the Infinite, and a clear recognition of 'the shadow of surrounding cloud.' It has long ceased to put its trust in the fact, 'the supposed fact,'[1] and knows now that if it is to be saved it can only be saved by the idea. The way of salvation is indeed hard, for the same mind that thus puts its trust in ideas must have capacity to know that those ideas, in which it lives, are in truth no more than its own ideas, dreams of the subject, and not true objects at all :—

'The lords of life, the lords of life,—
I saw them pass,
In their own guise,
Like and unlike,
Portly and grim,—
Use and Surprise,
Surface and Dream,
Succession swift and spectral Wrong,

[1] Arnold. Introduction to Mr. T. H. Ward's *Selections from the English Poets.*

Temperament without a tongue,
And the inventor of the game
Omnipresent without name ;—
Some to see, some to be guessed,
They march from east to west :
Little man, least of all,
Among the legs of his guardians tall,
Walked about with puzzled look.
Him by the hand dear Nature took,
Dearest Nature, strong and kind,
Whispered, "Darling, never mind !
To-morrow they will wear another face,
The founder thou ; these are thy race !"'

And yet those ideas which proceed from man, the offspring of his brain, are themselves the proof of a nature competent to comprehend the Universal show, and to entertain it as a guest. We dream true when we dream and see behind substance something as fluid as our thoughts, and of nature akin to them. We are the thought of Existence, and all existence is subject to our thought. The whole lives in its parts, and its parts revivify the whole.

In this philosophy there is no creed, and the best learning is an apprehending.

'Wilt thou not ope thy heart to know
What rainbows teach, and sunsets show?'

What consolation there is for us is to be found in acceptance, in an acquiescence in the course of an activity which certainly we do not understand but to which we also, being at once lawmakers and subject to the law, contribute our part :—

'I see the inundation sweet,
I hear the spending of the stream
Through years, through men, through nature fleet,
Through passion, thought, through power and dream.'

'They lose their grief who hear this song'; and it is heard by quite small things, such as the Titmouse, brave in its own life, that sang in the winter wood to the desponding poet:—

> 'Here was this atom in full breath,
> Hurling defiance at vast death.'

In fact life, wherever you meet it, is brave. It feels—the Titmouse, or Jenny Wren, even the London sparrow, that it is in a Universe of Life and consequently at home.

It is only man deceived by the loss of friends, and with his vision that takes in past and future, who recoils from the Law. He sees the end, or fears the end of his own activity, and forgets that activity continues. And certainly it points a contrast—dead tinder and living flame—that man so infinite in capacity should be enclosed in so little room:—

> 'A TRAIN of gay and clouded days
> Dappled with joy and grief and praise,
> Beauty to fire us, saints to save,
> Escort us to a little grave.'

ARNOLD

Of all Arnold's dicta on the subject of Literature his statement about Poetry is the best known:—'It is important, therefore, to hold fast to this, that Poetry is at bottom a criticism of life; that the greatness of a poet lies in his powerful and beautiful application of ideas to life—to the question how to live.'[1]

The first remark that suggests itself—it is so obvious that I cannot avoid making it—is that this is a definition of Poetry which does not distinguish poetry from prose. Carlyle's character sketch of Coleridge, in his life of Sterling, is very obviously at bottom a criticism of life, and it has nothing more poetical about it than caustic irony usually has.

Arnold himself came to acknowledge this, and in a later essay he qualified his dictum accordingly:—'For supreme poetical success more is required than the powerful application of ideas to life; it must be application under the conditions fixed by the laws of poetic truth and beauty.'[2] And no doubt, with this qualification, what Arnold here says of Poetry is true in a general sense. A good many things that can be said about Poetry are true in a general sense.

Poetry is at bottom a representation of life. Is this true? Yes, it is true in a general sense.

[1] Essay on Wordsworth prefixed to the volume of selections.

[2] Introduction to *The English Poets*, selections edited by T. H. Ward.

In this general wide sense then, in this loose sense, it is true to say Poetry is a criticism of life; it is *one* of the true things that can be said about Poetry. Each man's life is his implicit criticism of human life. A monk shows us by his conduct that he thinks of human life as providing leisure for fasting and prayer; a pretty girl by hers that it gives occasion for balls and dress; a drunkard thinks human life affords opportunity for the vine. From the conduct of these people we know what they think worth while in life, or what in life is pleasurable to them. We know what would be their judgment or criticism on life if they stopped to pass one.

In the same way every poet's poetry has, implied in it, a criticism of life. What he celebrates, what he passes by, how and when he feels, these tell us what he really thinks about life.

Thus when Hamlet is dying he says to Horatio: Do not commit suicide, but live on to tell my story; and he says it in this way:—

'Absent thee from felicity awhile.'

The mists of death which 'o'er-crow the spirit,' that against which the physical body rebels, may, when compared to the world so harsh to Hamlet, be described as felicity.[1] Hamlet speaking of death in such terms is Hamlet criticising life. It was good to be gone.

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[1] It may be said that Hamlet's 'felicity' is merely a mode of saying 'Heaven' or 'the abode of the blessed,' a picturesque and poetical way, and so it is. But why should Heaven figure to Shakespeare just at this moment and nowhere else in his plays as especially the abode of 'felicity'? Modes of phrase are dictated by modes of feeling, and, when Shakespeare wrote it, he was sympathetically *feeling* the *rest* to which Hamlet was going.

Again Wordsworth, reflecting on the short life of a flower, how soon it withers, and how gay and shining it is when first it begins to blow, cries out :—

> 'O man, that from thy fair and shining youth
> Age might but take the things youth needed not.'[1]

And Carew, who is not a didactic poet, opens a poem in this way :—

> 'He that loves a rosy cheek
> Or a coral lip admires.'

From these different sayings we form a fairly accurate idea of the differing ways in which their authors viewed life, and of the kind of criticism which, had they been called upon to do so, and Wordsworth does generally feel himself called upon, they would have passed upon it.

It is true then, and worth saying, that all poetry is a criticism of life, expresses the poet's view of life, and that by his view of life his poetry ultimately will be in great part judged. If it is a very ignoble view, his poetry, even if it contains great passion and great fire, will not be very great.

This is to say that Arnold's famous statement is true, in a general sense, of all poetry.

But it is much more than true in a general sense ; it is precisely true when applied to his own poetry. A very great proportion of Arnold's poetry is occupied with passing actual judgments on life or portions of life—youth, age—or aspects of life—literature, society, religion ; a very great proportion is occupied with passing judgments as direct as that judgment of Words-

[1] 'The Small Celandine.'

worth's evoked by the lesser celandine. And even when Arnold is not thus occupied his attitude generally is critical; at any rate it is intellectually reflective. He does not merely respond to life, he does not merely interpret life, he reflects upon life.

Generally speaking, the critical poet, the poet who is always criticising, does not write poetry at all: though he expresses himself in verse, he writes prose. Long before his considering is done, all the fire, gush, and spontaneity of his thought has departed. But what makes the peculiarity of Arnold's poetry is that this is not so. He is a genuine poet, and at his best, and he is very often at his best, he feels pre-eminently as a poet. His reflective habit does not displace his feeling, it is added to it; nor does it whittle it away in detail. What happens is that his reflective habit cools and expands his feeling; he is long on one note, but the feeling is there behind his verses and informing them.

Arnold, at his best, is a reflective poet and a very great reflective poet. With this said, it remains to be said that there is a very great deal of Arnold's poetry which is just criticism in verse; admirable criticism, and criticism very tersely expressed, expressed with all the epigramatic terseness of verse.

Here is a criticism of Heine:—

> 'The Spirit of the world,
> Beholding the absurdity of men—
> Their vaunts, their feats—let a sardonic smile,
> For one short moment, wander o'er his lips;
> *That smile was Heine!*'

It is not often, of course, that the criticism is expressed so barely, with so little sentiment in it; on the contrary what is remarkable is how seldom, even when

it is explicit criticism, it is really unpoetical, how seldom it occurs without some admixture of feeling. But before discussing this further, let us consider how much, and how much memorable criticism there is.

There are a few passages of literary criticism that will suggest themselves to every memory :—

> 'Time may restore us in his course
> Goethe's sage mind and Byron's force ;
> But where will Europe's latter hour
> Again find Wordsworth's healing power ?'

or this on Byron,—

> 'our soul
> 'Had *felt* him like the thunder's roll' ;

or again,—

> 'What helps it now, that Byron bore,
> With haughty scorn that mock'd the smart,
> Through Europe to the Ætolian shore,
> The pageant of his bleeding heart ?'

or the following passage from the poem on the odd subject, an odd subject for a poem, of Lessing's Laocoon. What is the poet's sphere? asks Arnold in his 'Epilogue to Lessing's Laocoon' :—

> '"Behold, at last the poet's sphere !
> But who," I said, "suffices here ?
> For, ah ! so much he has to do ;
> Be painter and musician too !
> The aspect of the moment show,
> The feeling of the moment know !
> The aspect not, I grant, express
> Clear as the painter's art can dress ;
> The feeling not, I grant, explore
> So deep as the musician's lore—
> But clear as words can make revealing,
> And deep as words can follow feeling.

But, ah! then comes his sorest spell
Of toil—he must life's *movement* tell!
The thread which binds it all in one,
And not its separate parts alone.
The *movement* he must tell of life,
Its pain and pleasure, rest and strife;
His eye must travel down, at full,
The long, unpausing spectacle;
With faithful unrelaxing force
Attend it from its primal source,
From change to change and year to year
Attend it of its mid career,
Attend it to the last repose
And solemn silence of its close.'

Or take this flash of religious criticism, attacking the anthropomorphism of the time, and praising the author of *Obermann*, who

'Neither made man too much a God,
Nor God too much a man';

or this piece of vital criticism complaining of what, to the thinker, is the worst insult of old age,—

'To hear the world applaud the hollow ghost
Which blamed the living man';

or this piece of social criticism explaining Arnold's sense of

'This strange disease of modern life,
With its sick hurry, its divided aims,'

where he says—

'But we, brought forth and rear'd in hours
Of change, alarm, surprise—
What shelter to grow ripe is ours,
What leisure to grow wise?'

What leisure to see like Sophocles,

'Who saw life steadily, and saw it whole.'

There is in us, as there was in the actress Rachel, a mixture in the soul, a strife of various influences :—

> 'In her, like us, there clash'd contending powers,
> Germany, France, Christ, Moses, Athens, Rome.'

Arnold, then, in his verse production figures as a critic, as a literary, social, and religious critic, and this he does whether he is or is not writing poetry. Perhaps the best instance of his success as a poetical critic, a critic speaking in poetry, is that sonnet in which he rebuked an excited preacher who called upon his audience to live in harmony with Nature :—

> '"In harmony with Nature?" Restless fool,
> Who with such heat dost preach what were to thee,
> When true, the last impossibility—
> To be like Nature strong, like Nature cool!
> Know, man hath all which Nature hath, but more,
> And in that *more* lie all his hopes of good.
> Nature is cruel, man is sick of blood;
> Nature is stubborn, man would fain adore;
> Nature is fickle, man hath need of rest;
> Nature forgives no debt, and fears no grave;
> Man would be mild, and with safe conscience blest.
> Man must begin, know this, where Nature ends;
> Nature and man can never be fast friends.
> Fool, if thou canst not pass her, rest her slave!'

It is an admirable instance of Arnold's success as a poetical critic, because, though the criticism is there, it is poetically expressed, poetically felt. There is not only criticism but criticism presented poetically, so poetically that we hardly feel we are listening to criticism; at least we begin to feel we are not. We can see the poet, the man who feels, getting on terms with the critic, the man who thinks. And in what Arnold says about the poet's province, in the verses called 'Resignation,' we see this even more clearly. Indeed, here,

though the attitude is critical and the critical mind is still thoroughly alert, the result expressed is not the expression of criticism, but the expression of feeling. It is the kind of poetry that gets itself written by a man capable of the nicest shades of discernment, but it is not consciously critical. In this way a deeply critical nature, in this way a highly refined nature given to refining, in this way such a nature feels :—

'The poet, to whose mighty heart
Heaven does a quicker pulse impart,
Subdues that energy to scan
Not his own course, but that of man.
Though he move mountains, though his day
Be pass'd on the proud heights of sway,
Though he hath loosed a thousand chains,
Though he hath borne immortal pains,
Action and suffering though he know—
He hath not lived, if he lives so.
He sees, in some great-historied land,
A ruler of the people stand,
Sees his strong thought in fiery flood
Roll through the heaving multitude,
Exults—yet for no moment's space
Envies the all-regarded place.
Beautiful eyes meet his—and he
Bears to admire uncravingly ;
They pass—he, mingled with the crowd,
Is in their far-off triumphs proud.
From some high station he looks down,
At sunset, on a populous town ;
Surveys each happy group which fleets,
Toil ended, through the shining streets,
Each with some errand of its own—
And does not say : *I am alone.*
He sees the gentle stir of birth
When morning purifies the earth ;
He leans upon a gate, and sees
The pastures, and the quiet trees.
Low woody hill with gracious bound
Folds the still valley almost round ;

The cuckoo, loud on some high lawn,
Is answer'd from the depths of dawn ;
In the hedge straggling to the stream,
Pale, dew-drench'd, half-shut roses gleam ;
And,[1] where the farther side slopes down,
He sees the drowsy new-waked clown
In his white quaint-embroider'd frock
Make, whistling, toward his mist-wreathed flock—
Slowly, behind his heavy tread,
The wet, flower'd grass heaves up its head.
Lean'd on his gate, he gazes—tears
Are in his eyes, and in his ears
The murmur of a thousand years.
Before him he sees life unroll,
A placid and continuous whole—
That general life, which does not cease,
Whose secret is not joy, but peace ;
That life, whose dumb wish is not miss'd
If birth proceeds, if things subsist ;
The life of plants, and stones, and rain,
The life he craves—if not in vain
Fate gave, what chance shall not control,
His sad lucidity of soul.'[2]

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[1] Arnold has 'But,' but surely the sense requires 'And.' There is no opposition, there is merely a succession of things seen.

[2] The tone of this is more Emersonian than is usual with Arnold. 'Sad lucidity' is an Arnoldian, but 'lucidity of soul' a strictly Emersonian phrase. One is tempted to think Arnold had just laid down the volume of 'Poems,' 1846. In that volume the second poem is 'Each and All,' which begins :—

'Little thinks, in the field, yon red-cloaked clown,
Of thee from the hill-top looking down ;
The heifer that lows in the upland farm,
Far-heard, lows not thine ear to charm' ;

and it ends—

'Again I saw, again I heard,
The rolling river, the morning bird ;—
Beauty through my senses stole ;
I yielded myself to the perfect whole.'

The poem is not about a poet, but about the relation of each to all. Yet the resemblances are curious. In each there is the looker-

Arnold is *at once* a critical poet and a reflective poet; and one can see from those two examples how criticism shades off into reflection, and meditation into feeling. In reading this passage from 'Resignation' we feel that we have been reading poetry. It is the feeling with which it is surcharged that strikes home. No one can read that passage and remain quite the same man as he was before. To agree with a critic does not involve a change in the mind? No, but to feel with a poet does.

Indeed Arnold is quite uniquely successful as a critical *poet*. He attempts generally things much less hard than Emerson and Meredith; but constantly when he attempts to make poetry out of critical material, he makes it. The passage just cited, for example, is less general and more detailed in its reference than Emerson's 'Each and All.' This definition of the poet's attitude to things is the hardest thing in poetry that Arnold attempts, but one has only to compare it with Emerson's poem which deals with a comparatively easy subject on which to make poetry, to know which is more basically a poet. Arnold's fund of poetical sensibility is so great that it overrides obstacles.

I do not mean to claim for Arnold that he is

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on and in each the 'clown.' In each the looker-on looks from a hill. The panorama is below him. In each the looker-on has no part in the panorama, and in each, final consolation is found in the continuance of the process :—

'The rolling river, the morning bird'

in Emerson, and in Arnold

'That general life which does not cease,'

and

The life of plants, and stones, and rain.'

always successful—many of the verses in the parts of 'Resignation' not here quoted are not poetry at all—but he is constantly successful, and when he is successful, he is supremely successful :—

> 'Lean'd on his gate, he gazes—tears
> Are in his eyes, and in his ears
> The murmur of a thousand years.'

That is not only an exact statement of the full content of the poet's attitude to life as a whole; it has the whole of the poet's emotion in it. Here is a bit of æsthetics made into what is very nearly the highest poetry, poetry so potent that it can change, and has changed for many, the individual's relation to existence.

If I seem to labour this point needlessly, it is because this side of Arnold's achievement is far and away the most important thing about him as a poet. He is the one modern Englishman, and therefore the one Englishman, who has made critical matter so much poetry that it has become a part of our poetical inheritance. At times he does perfectly what, when placed beside him, Emerson and Meredith seem often only to attempt. In the main they are critics of life who, by virtue of the clarity or enthusiasm of their criticism, and because their whole being is permeated with it, ascend with it into poetry. Arnold is a poet who condescends upon criticism.

One of the poems most familiar to the lover of Arnold is the beautiful piece of modern apologetics called 'East London' :—

> ''Twas August, and the fierce sun overhead
> Smote on the squalid streets of Bethnal Green,
> And the pale weaver, through his windows seen
> In Spitalfields, look'd thrice dispirited.

I met a preacher there I knew, and said:
"Ill and o'erwork'd, how fare you in this scene?"—
"Bravely!" said he; "for I of late have been
Much cheer'd with thoughts of Christ, *the living bread.*"
O human soul! as long as thou canst so
Set up a mark of everlasting light,
Above the howling senses' ebb and flow,
To cheer thee, and to right thee if thou roam—
Not with lost toil thou labourest through the night!
Thou mak'st the heaven thou hop'st indeed thy home.'

Insurgent emotion! and so clearly so, that I suppose few have stopped to remark that the sonnet is merely an epitome of 'Literature and Dogma.' It does in poetry what 'Literature and Dogma' does in prose, what 'Literature and Dogma' could only do because of this emotion behind it. Such success as this disguises itself. Arnold seems to be writing poetry like other poets, and we forget that he is criticising. The emotion is singularly contagious, and we feel with the poet before we have time to think with the critic.

This, then, is the most important thing, because it is the most unique thing, about Arnold as a poet. I do not mean it is the greatest thing. Arnold is not chiefly a man who attempts a task; he is a natural poet and his sentiment is profound:—

'No, thou shalt not speak! I should be finding
Something alter'd in thy courtly tone.
Sit—sit by me! I will think, we've lived so
In the greenwood, all our lives, alone.'

His thought breathes itself into music as easily as the wind in a September tree.

His best poetry is not critical, it is the expression of his sentiment, his personal[1] and religious sentiment.

[1] '*Who*, let me say, *is this stranger regards me*
With the grey eyes, and the lovely brown hair?'

When viewed from this aspect, the sonnet just quoted is itself a remarkable instance of this. No doubt this poetry reflects upon life, but this is only to say that Arnold was by nature reflective, and that his best poetry expresses his nature.

In tone this veritable poetry of Arnold's is curiously differentiated from his prose. You would say from reading his prose that he had a sunny nature, and so he had. You would say from reading his poetry that he was deeply melancholy, and so he was :—

> 'Radiant, adorn'd outside; a hidden ground
> Of thought and of austerity within.'

It is not an inexplicable difference. In his prose we have Arnold's work-a-day attempt to make bad better, and, on this bright mission, some whistling to keep his courage up. In his poetry we have his real and deeper feeling that we, who lived while he was still with us, are at the end of days. Arnold, with a positive faith not very different from Emerson's, was in the inner depths of his being profoundly stirred by the loss of the old, and not greatly heartened by the coming of the new.[1]

Yet if we are to consider his poetry from the standpoint of lastingness and not from that of personal charm, this constitutes a weakness. He does not owe his great place in the history of religious thought to any such amiability. What he accomplished in religion he accomplished by teaching us to express

[1] 'But now the old is out of date,
The new is not yet born,
And who can be *alone* elate,
While the world lies forlorn?'

Verses not otherwise remarkable than as expressing very succinctly his actual attitude.

our negations positively, by teaching us not to say 'I do not believe in the history of the Jews,' but to say 'I believe in the history of man,' not to say 'I do not believe in the prophets,' but to say 'I believe in the world.' This is Emerson's method too, but Emerson has not the same awed reverence; he is perhaps too much alive to have it. It is true, also, that on the negative side of his creed, Emerson in actual fact says much less than Arnold; nevertheless his attitude to the positive side of it is not so emotional. Emerson's religion is with some differences, such as his much lighter appreciation of necessity, the same religion as Arnold's, but the tone is different. Emerson is the announcer of a religion, Arnold the follower of one. What is personal about Arnold's religious attitude is not, of course, that he shared with many a disbelief in tradition, or with Emerson a belief in spirit, but that this untraditional religion of his affected him in precisely the same way as traditional religion affects the faithful.[1] He *feels* religiously, and our inestimable debt to him is that he taught us how much religion every man's nature of necessity contained. He taught us to remember that, however slightly others account them, these basic religious feelings of fear, mystery, submission, strange feelings of the heart's own confidence; these basic religious

[1] For example. 'The lives and deaths of "the pure in heart" have, perhaps, the privilege of touching us more deeply than those of others—partly, no doubt, because with them the disproportion of suffering to desert seems so unusually great. However, with them one feels—even I feel—that for their purity's sake, if for that alone, whatever delusions they may have wandered in, and whatever impossibilities they may have dreamed of, they shall undoubtedly, in some sense or other, see God.'

feelings *are* religious. He taught us not to be cheated out of our religion because the orthodox call our lack of their religion, irreligion.

But in his poetry there is too frequent a melancholy, at times a minus note, the cry of the defeated soul outside the gates barred on man's Eden. He has more tears than Nature sheds. A poetry of regret and loss can never be of the same service to mankind as a poetry that accepts the world as it sees it.

And yet no genuine poetry can ever be other than it is, and if it is the weakness of Arnold's that it is without sufficient confidence, it is equally a necessity of its charm that it should voice his own inner sense of loss. His poetry is a lament, yet the lament is the melody. The meaning and the colour is passing out of life, and there is no meaning and no colour to come. The tone of this poetry is grey, an exquisite grey. It is a poetry of regret that somehow, by the restraint in its grief, by the command of its sorrow, fans the fevered brow :—

> 'And there arrives a lull in the hot race
> Wherein he doth for ever chase
> That flying and elusive shadow, rest.
> An air of coolness plays upon his face,
> And an unwonted calm pervades his breast.
> And then he thinks he knows
> The hills where his life rose,
> And the sea where it goes.'

Nor is this regretful tone, however frequent, really tedious. It is varied by a poetry of joy, not the joy of hope, but joy. All perfectly regretful musings, we shall see if we consider it even for a moment, must mourn for a joy that is past. The mortal condition disappoints us ; 'our boasted life is one long funeral' ;

friend follows friend away, but in the morning, with those friends, it was sweet. Sometimes the body, worn out by the trouble and difficulties of the sensitive spirit, gives out even before its allotted span, and one has to mourn for Thyrsis, dead in the first forties at the entrance to man's summer :—

'So, some tempestuous morn in early June,
When the year's primal burst of bloom is o'er,
Before the roses and the longest day—
When garden-walks, and all the grassy floor,
With blossoms, red and white, of fallen May,
And chestnut-flowers are strewn—
So have I heard the cuckoo's parting cry,
From the wet field, through the vext garden-trees,
Come with the volleying rain and tossing breeze :
The bloom is gone, and with the bloom go I!'

Yes, life is unsatisfying in its evanescence, a spark between two unlit spaces, and in itself, in the continuity of its joy or work, delusive :—

'And if a life,
With large results so little rife,
Though bearable, seem hardly worth
This pomp of worlds, this pain of birth';

yet, when it is done and we look back on it, the air blew fresh :—

'So rest, for ever rest, O princely Pair!
In your high church, 'mid the still mountain-air,
Where horn, and hound, and vassals, never come.
Only the blessed Saints are smiling dumb
From the rich painted windows of the nave
On aisle, and transept, and your marble grave;
Where thou, young Prince, shalt never more arise
From the fringed mattress where thy Duchess lies,
On autumn-mornings, when the bugle sounds,
And ride across the drawbridge with thy hounds
To hunt the boar in the crisp woods till eve.'

This it is—that we must part from them—that gives their pathos to

'Youth and bloom and this delightful world.'

If man remained for ever young and had no end to fear, if he did not feel his bones to creak or his veins to throb, if he remained as unconscious of his body and its burden as a school-boy, if, indeed, it were always May, who would quarrel with our lot? Not Arnold! He is conscious, surprisingly conscious for a reflective poet, of the joys of youthful life, of the imaginary joys of the unfading youth of the gods. All his serious bids for pathos are made upon this theme. The sad thing is that so many die young with their life's hope unfulfilled, that others who live long have never tasted life.

Thus the story of the young Sohrab and his death is told with a pathos that is very moving, because it is so full of a consciousness of the joys of youth, when the heart first expands in its affections, and feels the glow, still unchilled by the winds of death, of human love. But young Sohrab has to die, and by an accident, so that even the average human lot, full of pain and parting as it is, promised, fairly, *more*. And Arnold moves us more than other poets because he bears uncomplainingly; thinks of Sohrab's death and weeps, but draws his manhood together as he rests in the wide idea of Death, surrounding us like the quiet spaces of the night sky, really to us as the sea is to a river, for all its wandering, a final home:—

'for many a league
The shorn and parcell'd Oxus strains along
Through beds of sand and matted rushy isles—
Oxus, forgetting the bright speed he had
In his high mountain-cradle in Pamere,

A foil'd circuitous wanderer—till at last
The long'd-for dash of waves is heard, and wide
His luminous home of waters opens, bright
And tranquil, from whose floor the new-bathed stars
Emerge, and shine upon the Aral sea.'

He thinks so of Sohrab's death, and so also of Balder's accepting the doom assigned. It is remarkable how he treats Tristram and Iseult, the subject of which is life fulfilling itself, also as a theme of reminiscence. On the lovers' ecstasies he looks backward, and in his hands it is a tale of youth that fled.

There is a passage in this perfect thing which, with the years, does not lose its power to make still; that passage where Arnold tells of the long quiet life of Iseult of Brittany with her children, after Tristram, with his passion for another Iseult of a stranger and wilder beauty, is dead.

'And is she happy? Does she see unmoved
The days in which she might have lived and loved
Slip without bringing bliss slowly away,
One after one, to-morrow like to-day?
Joy has not found her yet, nor ever will—
Is it this thought that makes her mien so still,
Her features so fatigued, her eyes, though sweet,
So sunk, so rarely lifted save to meet
Her children's? She moves slow; her voice alone
Hath yet an infantine and silver tone,
But even that comes languidly; in truth,
She seems one dying in a mask of youth.
And now she will go home, and softly lay
Her laughing children in their beds, and play
Awhile with them before they sleep; and then
She'll light her silver lamp, which fishermen
Dragging their nets through the rough waves, afar,
Along this iron coast, know like a star,
And take her broidery-frame, and there she'll sit
Hour after hour, her gold curls sweeping it;
Lifting her soft-bent head only to mind
Her children, or to listen to the wind.

> And when the clock peals midnight, she will move
> Her work away, and let her fingers rove
> Across the shaggy brows of Tristram's hound
> Who lies, guarding her feet, along the ground ;
> Or else she will fall musing, her blue eyes
> Fix'd, her slight hands clasp'd on her lap ; then rise,
> And at her prie-dieu kneel, until she have told
> Her rosary-beads of ebony tipp'd with gold,
> Then to her soft sleep—and to-morrow 'll be
> To-day's exact repeated effigy.'

This tone of patience is heard in all Arnold's poetry, and it is heard because his poetry is devout. It has more of the cloister in it than is to be found in any other poetry of our time, so much more that there is even some initial difficulty of appreciation ; a greater depth of Christian feeling and a fuller understanding of the doctrine of self-surrender than we have capacity properly to realise. If we were to compare it with the finest attitude of a Pagan age or temper, we should see that what we have to deal with here is not the beautiful superiority to life which we find in Marcus Aurelius, or even in the last reported sayings of John Brown,[1] but submission to life. And so real is this temper that other poets in their efforts to represent it seem like boys playing with half-apprehended ideas. Put Tennyson's 'St. Agnes' Eve' beside the passage just quoted, and how frail and

[1] 'His guards and attendants can talk of nothing but his natural cheerfulness, which seems never to have given way at all. He was a man of few words ; and any long conversations, any preachments, given out as his utterances, must be distrusted. His conduct and manners were just those of a man to whom nothing particular was happening. When an officer, impressed with this, asked him plainly whether he really felt no recoil at all from what awaited him ; he replied, Why, no ; but that fear was not his trial. He was not liable to fear. He had in the course of his life suffered far more from bashfulness than fear.'

external becomes that exquisite picture of the emotion of another. Compared with Arnold, Tennyson, the Broad Churchman, is a man who has heard of Christianity, and Browning, the optimist, with his Abt Vogler melodies, a brave citizen with a Sunday mood: much vigour and confidence of blood sings with Browning when he sings his masterful hymns. But in the inner sanctuary of Arnold we are admitted to a place removed, as much withdrawn from the activities of living, and as dead to them, as a rayless star, a place accessible only to the rare poet and the rarer saint, the saint who is satisfied with his own quietism and does not seek to *do* good. There is an abnegation of the private will, and this without any parade. 'I yielded myself to the perfect whole,' says Emerson, but in so saying, he seems merely to be politely waiving resistance to the claims of the Universe to absorb the most persistent individuality in literature. It was a voluntary act, and Emerson is the gracious victor in that as in every contest. The tone of Arnold is altogether different. He is not the individual who decides, but the thing which is affected. The Universe, this you feel in his poems, is everywhere greater than man is. His still music comes from him in response to ideas which shake the forest of men like a reed, to which they owe their life, and which make them distinguishably human. To Arnold, the one thought that through the years comes permanently sweet is that of the life of Jesus, and the one idea that consoles, in permanent opposition to the hurry of the world, the idea of the Everlasting.

It is difficult to represent this, the breath and finer spirit of his feeling, but there is one poem which

of all his poems, it seems to me, represents it best. It is an early poem, and full of *longueurs* and immaturities which have sufficed to hide from critical appreciation the meaning of its tone. Moreover, the mere story of 'The Sick King in Bokhara' has a peculiarity and particularity that is a little distracting. There is an out-of-the-wayness in the external aspect of the religious experience with which it deals, which prevents many from realising how much it is about themselves. Besides, the demand of the 'poor man' formally religious, though in spirit quite forlornly selfish, is, when followed by his execution, so striking an episode that attention is concentrated upon it. And yet, of course, the religious experience of which the poem speaks is not the poor man's, but the King's.

The poem opens with the King present and, in attendance on him, Hussein. To them enters the Vizier, for whom the King has sent to afford him aid in his trouble. The Vizier wishes to know what troubles the King, and Hussein proceeds to tell him, the King standing patiently by, waiting for the Vizier's opinion.

Two days ago, says Hussein, a man came running, crying for justice, but the King would not heed. Again, yesterday, when the King went forth, the man came importunate and told his tale. The water in the land had dried up and the hot nights were unbearable. This poor man had collected water in a pitcher from a far spot, and put it by in a secret place that he might drink when he woke. But when he woke his pitcher was gone. His brothers had satisfied their thirst at his hoard, and having given the last drops to

his mother were now composing themselves to sleep. At that he broke forth and cursed them :—

'One was my mother—Now, do right!'

'But my lord mused a space, and said :
"Send him away, Sirs, and make on!
It is some madman!" the King said.
As the King bade, so was it done.'

But again this morning right in the King's path behold the man! If the King would not judge him in this world for his impiety, he must bear the guilt with him into the limitless future :—

'"What, must I howl in the next world,
Because thou wilt not listen here?"

Then they who stood about the King
Drew close together and conferr'd ;
Till that the King stood forth and said :
"Before the priests thou shalt be heard."

But when the Ulemas were met,
And the thing heard, they doubted not ;
But sentenced him, as the law is,
To die by stoning on the spot.

Now the King charged us secretly :
"Stoned must he be, the law stands so.
Yet, if he seek to fly, give way ;
Hinder him not, but let him go."

So saying, the King took a stone,
And cast it softly ;—but the man,
With a great joy upon his face,
Kneel'd down, and cried not, neither ran.'

Then the stones of the judgment fly fast :—

'My lord had cover'd up his face ;
But when one told him, "He is dead,"
Turning him quickly to go in,
"Bring thou to me his corpse," he said.'

Even now the bearers can be heard on the stair. The Vizier looks on the haggard face of the young King whose soul is bowed beneath another's burden, and he begins quietly, compassionately, and in the language of good sense, to distinguish. There is in truth no just occasion for sorrow; the victim was not of blood kin, far from it, and, had he been, this is the kind of thing that must happen. One would not wish it otherwise, that impiety should go unchecked, and that he who curseth father or mother should escape the operation of the law:—

> 'But being nothing, as he is,
> Why for no cause make sad thy face?—
> Lo, I am old! three Kings, ere thee,
> Have I seen reigning in this place.
>
> But who, through all this length of time,
> Could bear the burden of his years,
> If he for strangers pain'd his heart
> Not less than those who merit tears?
>
> Fathers we *must* have, wife and child,
> And grievous is the grief for these;
> This pain alone, which *must* be borne,
> Makes the head white, and bows the knees.'

It is really important that one should not give way to such outpourings of the heart. If one is to think of all the sad things that happen in the world one will always have occasion for sorrow. Suppose all is well in the palace (the little palace of one's own affections!) at least far away you can hear, if you lay your ear to the earth, the cry of the stolen slave child, the short heavy panting of the toilers, the ceaseless sound of quarrelling, and the uneasy tossing of disease. Life can only be supported on the supposition that to each man is not only his own sorrow but his own joy;

the poor, are they not always with us and always suffering?—

> 'All these have sorrow, and keep still,
> Whilst other men make cheer, and sing.
> Wilt thou have pity on all these?
> No, nor on this dead dog, O King!'

But the young man turns on his adviser a lack-lustre eye. In his ears is the sound of the earth that travails, in his vision, so that he cannot get it out, the mangled body his pity could not save, and in his bosom that overpowering feeling of sick disgust which proceeds from the soul disturbed :—

> 'O Vizier, thou art old, I young!
> Clear in these things I cannot see.
> My head is burning, and a heat
> Is in my skin which angers me.
>
> But hear ye this, ye sons of men!
> They that bear rule, and are obeyed,
> Unto a rule more strong than theirs
> Are in their turn obedient made.'

I have represented this poem very poorly if it appears to any one that the clear-eyed Emerson could have written it, or that any one could have written it but Arnold.

MEREDITH

SPECULATION as to the genesis of Meredith's poetical style ended, for the literary class, with the republication of the poems of 1851. It was clear that he was not a natural poet; that there was at first no magic, no capacity for essentially poetical thought, not much beyond competence. Meredith, at first, could do what others can do. In verse, occasionally truly melodious, he could say little, easily enough. The chief characteristic of the small volume is its diffuseness.[1] Even the poem which has most poetical quality in it ('Daphne'), has a spread effect. 'The Two Blackbirds' is spoilt by not knowing how to stop half way. The short

[1] 'Chillianwallah' has some 'natural music':—

'Chillianwallah, Chillianwallah!
'Tis a wild and dreary plain,
Strewn with plots of thickest jungle,
Matted with the gory stain.
There the murder-mouthed artillery,
In the deadly ambuscade,
Wrought the thunder of its treachery
On the skeleton brigade';

and there is a verse opening the Pastorals that lingers in my memory:—

'How sweet on sunny afternoons,
For those who journey light and well,
To loiter up a hilly rise
Which hides the prospect far beyond,
And fancy all the landscape lying
Beautiful and still.'

'Love in the Valley' reads longer than the much lengthened poem of later days. For the rest, there is expansive stuff and to spare.

Leaving out of account a few happy phrases and a really individual observation of country sights, the active effect of 'South-West Wind in the Woodland,'[1] or the fresh effect of a country girl, there was little accomplished; scattered shot fired in the air without apparent intention of hitting. One would have said there was no danger of obscurity, nor of anything else.

But with the next volume, published ten years later,

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[1] As for example :—

'Now, whirring like an eagle's wing
Preparing for a wide blue flight;
Now, flapping like a sail that tacks
And chides the wet bewildered mast;
Now, screaming like an anguish'd thing
Chased close by some down-breathing beak;
Now, wailing like a breaking heart,
That will not wholly break, but hopes
With hope that knows itself in vain;
Now, threatening like a storm-charged cloud;
Now, cooing like a woodland dove;
Now, up again in roar and wrath
High soaring and wide sweeping; now
With sudden fury dashing down
Full-force on the awaiting woods';

but the level is not as high. On the other hand, there are no other verses in the early 'Love in the Valley' quite as weak as this :—

'Comes a sudden question—should a strange hand pluck her!
Oh! what an anguish smites me at the thought.
Should some idle lordling bribe her mind with jewels!—
Can such beauty ever thus be bought?
Sometimes the huntsmen prancing down the valley
Eye the village lasses, full of sprightly mirth;
They see as I see, mine is the fairest!
Would she were older and could read my worth!'

a new poet presented himself. In those years Meredith had found his interests, which were political and moral, and there is now heart in his talk. The material is not essentially poetical material; on the contrary, essentially material of observation, and singularly far removed from the empty conventional subjects of the preceding volume, but there is often mastery. Some of the verses that appeared in 1862 had no doubt affinity with the earlier productions. In some there was still a tendency to be diffuse. 'Grandfather Bridgeman,' though it is saved by its humour, is not free from Mid-Victorian sentiment, and 'The Beggar's Soliloquy' attempts the same thing that is successfully done in 'The Old Chartist.' But in the main, even the failures were 'prophetic of the coming joy and strife.' In 'Margaret's Bridal Eve,' which is too wordy, in 'The Head of Bran the Blest,' which ends very poorly, in 'Cassandra,' which, but for its subject being infinitely better, might be good, one hears at times the future clinch.

In short, as soon as he has something to say, not usually a poetical something, Meredith takes poetical rank. Whether his task, before the end of his poetical career, does not become too hard for him is another question, but he achieved little or nothing till he had a task. No poet has ever been more indebted to having something to lean against. Emerson on conventional subjects was not so weak. Emerson was no love poet, yet when he was writing, or, as a better expression, failing to write, love poetry, he was Emerson. Meredith is not himself till he sets his teeth. With mouth open he is not the poet breathing the sunrise; with this attitude, in poetry he is a yokel. As a poet, commonly

so called, he is an ineffective and unindividual writer. As striving to give his matter poetical expression, he is one of the greatest who has made language subserve his use. It is not his task, hard as it is, that prevents him writing more poetically; it was his task that made him a poet.

The nature of this task was twofold. He had to learn to write on usual subjects so as to compel attention; he had to learn to write on unusual subjects.

His achievement therefore falls into two divisions, which however in two ways overlap. There is no distinct order of succession, for, though the choice of extremely unusual subjects is in the main a habit of later life, a fondness for subjects that are out of the way is developed almost as early as his habit of effective speech. Both habits grow in intensity side by side. The other overlapping concerns the manner. It is not only on usual subjects that he comes finally to write unusually. His habit of effortful writing becomes a general habit, and independent of the simplicity of the subjects. Some of his wryest and most effective contortions are on topics not in themselves easily susceptible of poetical treatment; topics strange to poetry. Again, when one speaks of Meredith writing so as to compel attention on usual subjects, one must be understood with the reservation that the most usual subjects treated by him become in some degree unusual; at least are set in a new light.

A serviceable distinction, then, among Meredith's successes would amount to not much more than this. He has poems which are chiefly remarkable for their quality of style, other poems that are chiefly remarkable, being poems, for their thought or philosophy.

The second class of poems forms Meredith's contribution to the poetical movement of the age, a movement which will be complete when at last we are able to see emotion and matter of thought as no longer separate.

The first class of poems, that class which contains the poems chiefly remarkable for their quality of style, is Meredith's contribution to poetry: how great and how singular a contribution has been under-emphasised by those, and it is natural the exponents of Meredith should be among them, who have eyes chiefly for the nuptials of philosophy and song.

But, in its way, it is an achievement as unique as the other. Meredith invented a poetical style. All great poets have a style of their own, a style which is themselves; but Meredith invented a style. He invented a new style in poetry for himself, just as Johnson for himself, for neither is imitable, invented a new style in prose. And he brought to this style-making some similar qualities; a capacity for classicalising English, an instinct for Saxon, and a hard pushing-through *sense*. These qualities appear in different proportions in the two writers. Besides, Meredith adds qualities of his own; he has light, and an ear peculiarly sensitive to the subtler effects of metre. He has, moreover, a sense of Comedy; not humour nor wit, properly so called, but the kind of benign grin his Earth Spirit sometimes wears. With these attributes he has one supreme power: he has few plain depths, but when he feels subtly he feels deeply. Give him a shade of feeling, or a half-formed feeling, and he is at the bottom of it in the same way in which Burns is at home with the elemental feelings of the heart. He uses a rapier and

he amuses you with its flickering, and then, suddenly, it is there.

The tale of the love felt by the good physician Melampus for the creatures of the wood is told in a sort of chequered sunlight, in verse with the grace of a long billow; the story-telling intellect flicking over its subject:—

> 'Now sleeping once on a day of marvellous fire,
> A brood of snakes he had cherished in grave regret
> That death his people had dealt their dam and their sire,
> Through savage dread of them, crept to his neck, and set
> Their tongues to lick him: the swift affectionate tongue
> Of each ran licking the slumberer: then his ears
> A forked red tongue tickled shrewdly: sudden upsprung,
> He heard a voice piping: Ay, for he has no fears!
>
> A bird said that, in the notes of birds, and the speech
> Of men, it seemed':

'The swift affectionate tongue'! Equally dependent on its style is 'The Old Chartist,' a simple tale of the reflections of a Radical on inequality and self-respect:—

> 'Whate'er I be, old England is my dam!
> So there's my answer to the judges, clear.
> I'm nothing of a fox, nor of a lamb;
> I don't know how to bleat nor how to leer:
> I'm for the nation!
> That's why you see me by the wayside here,
> Returning home from transportation.
>
> It's Summer in her bath this morn, I think.
> I'm fresh as dew, and chirpy as the birds:
> And just for joy to see old England wink
> Thro' leaves again, I could harangue the herds:
> Isn't it something
> To speak out like a man when you've got words,
> And prove you're not a stupid dumb thing?'

He sees a water-rat cleaning himself on the mud-bank, sharing the 'aplomb of animals,' happy in self-sufficiency, quadrupedally indifferent to all else:—

'You teach me a fine lesson, my old boy!
I've looked on my superiors far too long,
And small has been my profit as my joy.
You've done the right while I've denounced the wrong
Prosper me later!
Like you I will despise the sniggering throng,
And please myself and my Creator.'

The thought pleases him. He remembers, with kindliness all aglow, that his wife, without sharing his opinions, supported him at his trial:—

'She suffered for me:—women, you'll observe,
Don't suffer for a Cause, but for a man.
When I was in the dock she show'd her nerve:
I saw beneath her shawl my old tea-can.
Trembling . . . she brought it
To screw me for my work: she loath'd my plan,
And therefore doubly kind I thought it.

I've never lost the taste of that same tea:
That liquor on my logic floats like oil,
When I state facts, and fellows disagree.
For human creatures all are in a coil;
All may want pardon.
I see a day when every pot will boil
Harmonious in one great Tea-garden!'

Take him again in 'Martin's Puzzle.' Molly, who is as good as gold and half as pretty, has been run over by the village cart, pushed downstairs 'to make her go crooked,' and generally made the sport

'of that power
Which erring men call Chance.'

Martin wishes to embrace the creed of Pangloss and offers to himself several justifications of those troubles:—

'But the worst of *me* is, that when I bow my head,
I perceive a thought wriggling away in the dust,
And I follow its tracks, quite forgetful, instead
Of humble acceptance: for, question I must!

Here 's a creature made carefully—carefully made !
Put together with craft, and then stamped on, and why ?
The answer seems nowhere : it 's discord that 's played.
The sky 's a blue dish !—an implacable sky !'

'Here 's a creature made carefully—carefully made !' The quality here is the quality of style. Sometimes it is possible for the reader thus to particularise ; 'the swift affectionate tongue,' and, here, the studied repetition. Occasionally one can place one's finger on the line from which the magic radiates, but more often the quality is a pervading quality, and felt in a series of effects. Few things finer than 'The Orchard and the Heath'[1] have ever been written. The sense of childish delight so artfully caught by an intentional simplicity :—

'A small one tumbling sang, "Oh ! head !"'

the impression of spattered life, the consciousness of the vast livingness of Nature surrounding and enfolding all ; these are brought home to us, not by single lines, but by an obtrusive style ; a style that is at once so weighted and so alert with perception that it seems to be obtruded by a power behind itself ; an artificiality so convincing that it seems as if Nature required the artificiality to be seen.

In their different manners, 'The Day of the Daughter of Hades,' a poem which does not quite succeed,[2] but which leaves a permanent imaginative effect,

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[1] This poem is admirably analysed by Mr. Basil de Sélincourt, pp. 251-254, *George Meredith*, by M. Sturge Henderson.

[2] It does not succeed partly owing to a purely wanton obscurity, as Mr. Ker would express it, 'outside the poem.' The whole would be clear enough if we were told that the story was about

'Earth and a Wedded Woman'—no more than the arrangement of an impression—and 'Jump to Glory Jane'—

> 'Those flies of boys disturbed them sore
> On Sundays and when daylight wore:
> With withies cut from hedge or copse,
> They treated them as whipping-tops,
> And flung big stones with cruel aim;
> Yet all the flock jumped on the same';

in their different manners, these poems are wholly made by their style.[1]

Of course behind this style there is the personality of

Proserpine, the unwilling bride of Pluto; about her god-granted boon of periodical visits to the earth, and about her having a daughter born to Pluto, Skiageneia, who accompanies her parent on one of her visits to earth, and is overlooked when Proserpine returns. When Skiageneia is missed, Pluto comes up for her. This is very easily said, and it was merely wanton not to say it. Similarly, Meredith should have told us, in elucidation of 'Jump to Glory Jane,' that there was in actual fact a sect of Jumpers, and in elucidation of 'Periander' that Periander, Tyrant of Corinth, on one occasion, in a wild rage, wounded his wife Melissa so that she died; that afterwards he banished his son Lycophron, who grieved for his mother's death, to Corcyra, and that finally, many years having passed, and the Tyrant wearying of the cares of State, Periander offered to recall Lycophron to govern Corinth, he himself retiring as Governor of Corcyra. The Corcyræans, not liking the prospect of this exchange, killed Lycophron, and Periander died of grief.

With this told, the poem is quite clear. Left untold, there is no better instance of obscurity 'outside a poem.'

[1] 'The Appeasement of Demeter' furnishes another instance of the vital service to Meredith of his attention-arresting speech. In itself the poem is, in subject, affectedly actionless. Demeter has left Earth in a pet, and a blight falls on the valley; there is neither sun nor rain:—

> 'Now whether night advancing, whether day,
> Scarce did the baldness show.'

But instinct in the valley creatures still, at times, and half-heartedly,

Meredith, pleasingly cynical and intimately modern. But the style here is by no means merely the man. There is an elaborate, sometimes jocund, sometimes ironical artifice. You can see the conjurer waving his hands. These poems of Meredith's are a brilliant causerie on experience. 'Breath of the Briar' is a morsel touched with the 'swift affectionate tongue' of the intellect:—

> 'Green of rind, and redolent
> Of sweetness as a milking cow';

fresh as that apple and the vision recalled:—

> 'The damsel with her teeth on it;
> Her twinkle between frank and shy,
> My thirst to bite where she had bit.'

'Juggling Jerry' is the prettiest plaything that ever amused man that is mortal, and touched his fount of tears. In these ingenious verses, Meredith's playful excursus 'upon Setebos,' the acrobat must be particularised as a juggler, so that the metaphor (it is natural to speak in the terms of one's trade) may personify the irony of things:—

---

makes dumb attempt to play. This moves Demeter to laughter, and her laughter the sun to shine and the rain to fall:—

> 'She laughed: since our first harvesting heard none
> Like thunder of the song of heart: her face,
> The dreadful darkness, shook to mounted sun,
> And peal and peal across the hills held chase.
> She laughed herself to water; laughed to fire;
> Laughed the torrential laugh of dam and sire
> Full of the marrowy race.
> Her laughter, Gods! was flesh on skeleton.'

It is all *made* so important, so solid. The moods of the weather become concrete.

'Yonder came smells of the gorse, so nutty,
Gold-like and warm: it's the prime of May.
Better than mortar, brick and putty,
Is God's house on a blowing day.
Lean me more up the mound; now I feel it:
All the old heath-smells! Ain't it strange?
There's the world laughing, as if to conceal it,
But He's by us, juggling the change.'

It is difficult to say what pleases most in this poem, the brave trip of the dying humour of life slipping into the close, or the free, careless description of natural objects, as if death were a matter of unconcern. Jerry pretends not to know, but you know he does know. It is like a man stroking a cobra.

In these poems there is an impudence of insistent personality that makes them great literature. They are deliberately contrived, deliberately and successfully contrived, to be unlike anything else, and this difference is pleasing. One's own personality feels contagiously that it rides lightly over life.

Part of this feeling of irresponsible ascendency is produced by Meredith's amazing command of the lilt. It is this which makes 'Phœbus with Admetus,' forgiving its very ordinary chorus, what it is, like spring rain tinkling on the grass; and it is this which, as much as its other divine qualities, places much of the completed 'Love in the Valley' (as a whole it is prolix) among the completest triumphs of Art.

How beautifully made this poem is any one can see who places it beside its ineffective original. To write a simple poem about a simple country girl! Almost any one could do that; but to write of simplicity with a gem-like artifice, that was reserved for Meredith. Stevenson said of one verse, in the original, that it

intoxicated him like new wine. It is the only verse that is retained, and the whole completed poem has this effect. There is in it the anxious delicate amorousness of senses which are healthy, and with this undercurrent of sweet trembling and pensive naturalism there goes the eye of the connoisseur. There are verses that only Meredith could have written :—

'Cool was the woodside ; cool as her white dairy
Keeping sweet the cream-pan ; and there the boys from school,
Cricketing below, rushed brown and red with sunshine ;
O the dark translucence of the deep-eyed cool !
Spying from the farm, herself she fetched a pitcher
Full of milk, and tilted for each in turn the beak.
Then a little fellow, mouth up and on tiptoe,
Said, "I will kiss you" : she laughed and leaned her cheek.'

And there are verses, so perfect is the art, that it seems only Nature could have written :—

'All the girls are out with their baskets for the primrose ;
Up lanes, woods through, they troop in joyful bands.
My sweet leads : she knows not why, but now she loiters,
Eyes the bent anemones, and hangs her hands.
Such a look will tell that the violets are peeping,
Coming the rose : and unaware a cry
Springs in her bosom for odours and for colour,
Covert and the nightingale ; she knows not why.'

The ecstasy of this music is produced not merely by the lilt, but by its interruption,—'and hangs her hands,' as if a ripple were to hesitate in coming over ; the omitted accent

'Eyes the bent anemones' (stoops) 'and hangs her hands'

being replaced by a pause. And this artifice, simple as it is, in the hands of so consummate an artist has the effect of witchery. Its frequent repetition yields the effect of a second or inner music, following and mocking the light tripping rhythm of the whole. It has

been objected by some critics that 'Love in the Valley' is artificial. Other critics have complained that Burns wrote love songs. 'The qualities of sugar remain with sugar, and those of salt with salt.'

As great triumphs, though triumphs in another note, Meredith achieves in his later ballads. For the purpose of these poems of love and war, 'Attila,' 'Archduchess Anne,' 'The Song of Theodolinda,' 'A Preaching from a Spanish Ballad,' 'King Harald's Trance,' he has invented, to use Mr. de Sélincourt's word, a form of poetical 'shorthand' like the jobbing strokes of a chopper :—

> 'Her he eyed : his judgement was one word,
> Foulbed ! and she fell : the blow clove two.'

It is necessary to become familiar with the language ; but, this done, it is easily seen that there are no short poems more vivid, and none so barely dramatic. In narrative dramatic poetry, even when the narrator refrains from explicit comment, you can generally discover from the underlying emotion where his sympathies are. But these poems are entirely pure of any comment by the artist's emotion, and give the separate actions and ecstasies for what they are worth. It is true their range is not wide, and their brutal strength largely due to their being about brutes—about a brute of a husband, or a religious brute like the self-cherishing Theodolinda. They are not the highest poetry, and are worth no more than themselves, but for naked effectiveness they stand alone. Rembrandt painted a carcass.

Critics who read 'The Empty Purse' have been so occupied with explaining that Meredith was not a finished artist that they have omitted to notice that he was. For sheer artistry Meredith stands by himself

among modern poets. Tennyson was sufficiently an artist to display the poet Tennyson. Meredith is artist enough to make a poet :—

'Prophetic of the coming joy and strife,
Like the wild western war-chief sinking
Calm to the end he eyes unblinking,
Earth's voice is jubilant in ebbing life.[1]

He for his happy hunting-fields,
Forgets the droning chant, and yields
His numbered breaths to exultation
In the proud anticipation :
Shouting the glories of his nation,
Shouting the grandeur of his race,
Shouting his own great deeds of daring :
And when at last death grasps his face,
And stiffened on the ground in peace
He lies with all his painted terrors glaring ;
Hushed are the tribe to hear a threading cry :
Not from the dead man ;
Not from the standers-by :
The spirit of the red man
Is welcomed by his fathers up on high.'

The sharp e's and o's with the shrill i between—

'Not from the dead man ;
Not from the standers-by :
The spirit of the red man'—

are like pistol-shots ; then the music mellows, shoots up, and is gone, the air of the concert-room still thrilling with the recent quickly successive sounds. *Qualis artifex!*

There are two Nature poems of Meredith's dear to lovers of his philosophy, but which even on his first readers must exercise an arresting effect. The opening

[1] 'Earth's voice.' In the text 'Her voice'; 'her' referring to Earth, mentioned five or six lines earlier in the 'Ode to the Spirit of Earth in Autumn.'

passage of 'Hard Weather' is the nearest thing to a breezy morning on the high Downs that has yet got on paper :—

'Shrill underfoot the grassblade shrews,
At gallop, clumped, and down the croft
Bestrid by shadows, beaten, tossed ;
It seems a scythe, it seems a rod.
The howl is up at the howl's accost ;
The shivers greet and the shivers nod.

Is the land ship? we are rolled, we drive
Tritonly, cleaving hiss and hum ;
Whirl with the dead, or mount or dive,
Or down in dregs, or on in scum.
And drums the distant, pipes the near,
And vale and hill are grey in grey,
As when the surge is crumbling sheer,
And sea-mews wing the haze of spray.
Clouds—are they bony witches?—swarms,
Darting swift on the robber's flight,
Hurry an infant sky in arms :
It peeps, it becks ; 'tis day, 'tis night.
Black while over the loop of blue
The swathe is closed, like shroud on corse.
Lo, as if swift the Furies flew,
The Fates at heel at a cry to horse!'

'The South-Wester,' published in 1888, may be compared with 'The South-West Wind in the Woodland' of 1851.[1] There is a difference of thirty-seven years, but also that between a good description and actual sight. The transmutation of the clouds is a visible process :—

'A murky cloud a fair pursued,
Assailed, and felt the limbs elude :
He sat him down to pipe his woe,
And some strange beast of sky became :
A giant's club withheld the blow ;
A milky cloud went all to flame.'

[1] See note on page 202.

How is one to give the effect of sky and air?

'Day of the cloud in fleets! O day
Of wedded white and blue, that sail
Immingled, with a footing ray
In shadow-sandals down our vale!—
And swift to ravish golden meads,
Swift up the run of turf it speeds,
Thy bright of head and dark of heel,
To where the hilltop flings on sky,
As hawk from wrist or dust from wheel,
The tiptoe scalers tossed to fly.'

There is a huddle of compressed language, like the shift of light and blast of wind, the sort of bewildering of awakened senses one gets on such a day. And this is due to the manner. Yes, but a supreme manner brings matter with it, the only possible matter. 'In speaking,' writes Emerson, 'of I know not what style, Wordsworth said "to be sure, it was the manner, but then you know the matter always comes out of the manner."'

Of Meredith's manner it is necessary to add that so complete an artist does he train himself to be, he sometimes writes verse of the highest descriptive quality wholly free from artifice, verse like this from the 'Ode to the Spirit of Earth in Autumn,'—

'The crimson-footed nymph is panting up the glade,
With the wine-jar at her arm-pit, and the drunken ivy-braid
Round her forehead, breasts, and thighs: starts a Satyr, and they speed:
Hear the crushing of the leaves: hear the crackling of the bough!
And the whistling of the bramble, the piping of the weed';

or like this from 'Bellerophon,'—

'The cottagers who dole him fruit and crust,
With patient inattention hear him prate:
And comes the snow, and comes the dust,
Comes the old wanderer, more bent of late.'

We come to the second class of Meredith's poems, those poems which, being poems, are chiefly remarkable for their philosophy or thought. Meredith is emphatically a modern writer, and this modernity shows itself, in a hundred ways, all through his poetry. The 'Poems of the English Roadside,' 'The Old Chartist,' 'The Patriot Engineer,' good and less good, deal with subjects so little defined, so trivial or so intellectual, as to exclude them from any but a modern anthology. 'Juggling Jerry' is as modern a way of saying what one wants to say as 'Caliban upon Setebos' or 'Bishop Blougram's Apology.' The 'Ballads and Poems of Tragic Life' are poems of to-day in their absorbed interest in purely external action, action interesting for action's sake without aid from the poet's sentiment. 'The South-Wester' has an equally absorbed interest in pure description; it deals with Nature in the fashion first taught by Emerson's 'May Day.' 'The Appeasement of Demeter' and 'Earth and a Wedded Woman' are characteristically modern in their indifference to the subject; an indifference Arnold rebuked in his famous preface to his reprinted poems of 1853, a rebuke to which modern poetry has turned an ear increasingly deaf. 'Love in the Valley' itself has no action, and a hundred years ago even Wordsworth would not have attempted the extended theme. The critics of 1800 made themselves merry with what happened in Wordsworth's poems about people. This is to say that something generally did happen.[1]

[1] To meet the enemy's instance, the 'Idiot Boy' was lost. In 'The Brothers' the action is outside the poem, but the greater part is occupied with reminiscences of the one who was killed. I do not say there are not exceptions. There are, of course, many purely descriptive poems of flowers, yew-trees, natural objects.

In 'Modern Love' Meredith broke ground which in some sort he claimed to be new. In this poem or poems, sonnet sequence or sequence of poems the Sonnet is proud to claim, we have love-poetry of a new sort, poetry not about love in its fruition but in its decay, the detail of the irritant tedium of its absence and not the passion of its rupture. We have here neither *Romeo and Juliet* nor *Othello*, but the minutiae of what happens in the odd numbers of any terrace.

It is not the generous passion of the play-books, simple, and with 'the dignity of dumb real objects,' that is here celebrated, the desire past reason for some particular other—Francesca, Helen, 'Anna with the gowden locks.' Equally clearly it is not the love celebrated by Tennyson with individual delicacy in 'Maud,' the feeling of the pure man for the pure maid; a love which looks upon the beloved at once as mother, wife, and daughter, which has something of fatherly protection in it, looks as a son for support, and yet amid both cherishes the idea of equal mating. This feeling, which is quite modern,—'I have led her home, my love, my only *friend*,'—is by no means the feeling analysed in Meredith's poem. The senses are by no means absent in 'Modern Love,' though they are played with and controlled by the observing intellect. This it is which gives it its bitter and incisive truth :—

> 'What are we first? First, animals: and next
> Intelligences at a leap.'

Tennyson speaks of an ideal, which, however, to-day is sometimes realised by the young. Meredith describes a mental state which, in a late civilisation, is

not uncommon with middle age. The æsthete and the moralist both complain that the subject is unpleasing.[1] What is worth observation is that the subject is not one that lends itself easily to poetical treatment. Indeed, without Meredith's treatment to assist our judgment, we might think that for poetical purposes it was impossible. But Meredith *has* used it for a poetical purpose. It is not the noblest poetry in all the world, but it is a noble poem.

How has he managed to effect this?

In two ways. In the first place he surrounds the poem, which is very particular in its emotions, with emotion of a general kind—emotion so fluent, and speaking so widely of the sense of passion's loss, that at the beginning and end we are not dealing with the actual subject at all. And this breadth of opening and closing tone affects the whole impression.

In the second place, not always, but exceedingly often, the slack detail is lifted into the tense world of poetry. The grave intensity of observation saves the poet again and again. 'There is no object,' says Emerson, 'which intense light does not make beautiful.' The high seriousness is the high seriousness of lived

[1] The critic in the *Spectator*, May 24, 1862—the critic of whom Swinburne fell foul—'falls foul of Mr. Meredith for dealing with "a deep and painful subject on which he has no conviction to express."' This was to give himself into Swinburne's hands. The play of *Hamlet* has no conviction to express. But what made the critic express himself thus adversely was that he felt the subject was unpleasing. But to say this, though true, would not have been to offer criticism. Poetry not only is entitled to deal but must deal constantly with unpleasing subjects. The real question is whether, in any given instance, the subject is too unpleasing so to be treated as to yield poetical pleasure. It is always difficult to answer this question *a priori*: the treatment answers it.

emotion. Phases of feeling so felt become crises of the heart :—

'At dinner, she is hostess, I am host.
Went the feast ever cheerfuller? She keeps
The Topic over intellectual deeps
In buoyancy afloat. They see no ghost.
With sparkling surface-eyes we ply the ball :
It is in truth a most contagious game :
HIDING THE SKELETON shall be its name.
Such play as this, the devils might appal!
But here 's the greater wonder ; in that we
Enamoured of an acting nought can tire,
Each other, like true hypocrites, admire ;
Warm-lighted looks, Love's ephemerioe,
Shoot gaily o'er the dishes and the wine.
We waken envy of our happy lot.
Fast, sweet, and golden, shows the marriage-knot.
Dear guests, you now have seen Love's corpse-light shine.'

To write that sonnet and twenty others like it was to step twenty years forward in the march of modern poetry ; to combine them all with a single seriousness, so that their effect was not separate, was to do what the later century was trying to do. It was to emotionalise mental states. Whatever poetical judgment may ultimately be passed on 'Modern Love,' its place in the history of the new poetical movement will be that of the first miracle.[1]

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[1] 'Modern Love' has two outstanding weaknesses : (*a*) It is a tale of love ceasing to burn, and then sputtering out. Two wedded people cease to love mutually—that is all. Unless there is scandal to force a crisis, the unhappy partnership continues, and the tale is the tale of two lives dragging on. The stately end invented by Meredith is not true to life. It is a concession to the claims of traditional art, and while there is thus a gain in poetical effect, it is at the expense of the truth of Nature.

(*b*) 'Modern Love' suffers greatly from an obscurity 'outside the poem.' The poem is for Meredith singularly clear in language, but

Later in life Meredith returned to the discussion of modern sex relations, but the subject of 'The Sage Enamoured and the Honest Lady' was, for the purposes of poetry, beyond him. Despite some occasional flashes of the highest descriptive imagination,[1] he does not produce a successful poem. More often even than usual, flogging like the rider of a beaten horse, he indulges in

> 'That sly temptation of the illumined brain,
> Deliveries oracular, self-spun.'

Indeed this is not enough to say of so prevailing an obscurity. It is almost as if the language were studiedly difficult, as if the writer were not desirous to be plain. What is probably true is that throughout he was uneasily conscious how simply he could spoil all by an over-definiteness, or by neglecting at any time any side

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the story it tells is not clear. You have to read it two or three times to puzzle out a story which is more implied than told: to find out, for example, that 'Madam' is the hero's wife, and 'My Lady' a former flame 'relumed,' or that the hero sometimes speaks in the first person, sometimes in the third; or to puzzle out the particular turn of events preceding the particular sonnet remarking upon them. When such things have been ascertained (and they are ascertainable) the poem is plain. In fact, the series of sonnets is a series of comments by Meredith (standing in the hero's shoes) on scenes fully played out before him. When you, too, know the scenes, the comment is as plain to you as to Meredith. But it is a great defect in Art not to make one's *story* clear at first reading. It is the one thing perhaps that in narrative poetry, at first reading, *can* be made wholly clear. Here again there is a concession, though an unconscious one. To be very explicit about matters so very often merely matters of prose would have made the subject still harder to poeticalise. These weaknesses emphasise the extreme difficulty of the undertaking.

[1] 'Her eyes were the sweet world desired of souls,
With something of a wavering line unspelt.'

of truth. The main thesis is simple. Nature forms a harmonising background to the poem, but in the definite argument she is made use of only to say that we could borrow from her a more equal view. In societies the balance between man and woman is unequally weighted. The way of lightening suggested is a distribution of the penalty.

As express contributions to the sociological discussion, such pronouncements are now the commonplaces of Ethics, and yet the 'lyric has a tone.'[1] Clearly its content is not exhausted by these statements. We must consider what is implied by the atmosphere of difficulty and irresolution. All through, Meredith appears to be conscious of the existence of a deeper ill than any for which he knows the remedy. The poem at once disturbs and uplifts. It indicates a depth which Meredith does not fathom, which he knows is properly unfathomable. On such subjects it is especially true that law and custom, however wise—certainly when they are wise—can never cover the ground which is occupied by feeling. Nature and society can never be identified. There are antinomies everywhere, and it is because the poem is generously aware of them, and indeed takes in, in its 'blind sight,' the whole of the human consciousness, that it achieves at all.

And in truth, this is a large part of what poetry as opposed to sociology can do here, it can give an atmosphere, it can humanise, it can meliorate; and as much as this, this effort, for all that it is but broken speech, does, somehow, in its strange way,

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[1] 'he sang not Nature's own
Divinest, but his lyric had a tone,
As 'twere a forest-echo of her voice.'

manage to do. One feels, as one struggles through the thorns and brambles of the language, that one has come, for once, upon a competent attitude.

This poem, written in an offensively packed style, and in some passages merely decipherable in meaning, speaking with a parade of reserve wisdom, discreet, suggestive, inconclusive, is one of the most interesting failures in modern literature. There is no bridge, for we are not taken to the other side of the stream; the subject is not made into the subject of a poem, but we may say that something—a broken rainbow perhaps—stretches across. We have suggested to us the way in which such topics can be treated in poetry. Meredith teaches us at least the method of approach. Without making his subject into a poem, he has succeeded in poeticalising his subject. He has lifted it into the category of poetry.

If one can say so much of a botched splendour like 'The Sage Enamoured and the Honest Lady,' it will be easy to say the same of the more perspicuous 'Ballad of Fair Ladies in Revolt.' The tone is much lighter, as befits verses dealing with a claim viewed from its political, not its moral side, but otherwise the same criticism can be repeated in small. On the lesser subject Meredith, without being successful, comes a little nearer success. And yet the fact that he misses success, does not bring the thing off, is the primary fact. One notices this, and then that the whole subject of 'Women's Rights' is surveyed with a genial understanding. This is how gentlefolk of both sexes, cultivated people in touch with each other, should handle their divergencies. But the poem is too debonair; there is an artifice of manner, the argument

crossing and recrossing as in the preconcerted figures of the dance. Judged as a poem 'A Ballad of Fair Ladies in Revolt' does no more than indicate a temper.

> 'Men rail at such a singer; women thrill
> Responsively.'

The advocates of Sex equality have, here, lent to their doctrine the dignity of grace, and it is perhaps not strange that the less imaginative sex should, in this instance, be the more apt to appreciate the value of suggestion. In this field Meredith was the first; his poems dealing with the modern relations of the sexes are his special contribution to modern poetry.

In his greater contribution, his promulgation in verse of the Philosophy of Earth, he had been anticipated by Emerson. In general his doctrines are the same; a confidence in the worth of the process, and we even find in Emerson that way of speaking of the Great Mother which we familiarly know as Meredithian :—

> 'Where are these men? Asleep beneath their grounds
> And strangers, fond as they, their furrows plough.
> Earth laughs in flowers, to see her boastful boys
> Earth-proud, proud of the earth which is not theirs.'[1]

But the differences are more striking than the similarity. Emerson has no weak sentimentality, Meredith is anti-sentiment. He goes out of his way to proclaim his disrespect for senility, the one god men continue to honour, for thus they hope to be deified :—

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[1] Emerson—'Hamatreya.' If one were asked who wrote the last two lines, one would say Meredith. Even the adjectival Meredithian compound is supplied.

'Thy frame is as a dusty mantle hung,
O grey one! pendant on a loosened peg.
Thou art for this our life an ancient egg.'

That is direct.

'Her gabbling grey Earth eyes askant, nor treads
The ways they walk; by what they speak oppressed.'

That is equally so, and Meredith has even a whole poem, one of his most metaphorical, 'The Last Contention,'[1] in which he reviles the old man

'Whose toothless Winter claws at May.'

For Age is neither life nor the promise of life, and must not, in a last efflorescence, hope to emulate the naturally young. The office of Senex is quite different; 'to admire uncravingly,' and to consider what of life's glory meets his eye merely as a rosy cloud that crosses, to leave, the grey evening of his days.

On other subjects, provinces of general pathos, Meredith is as close to the bare fact. We shed a good many tears over the inhumanity of nature; still, to put it in another way, it is natural to be inhumane. These laws may not please us, but they remain laws—

'All round we find cold Nature slight
The feelings of the totter-knee'd.'

It is this universal struggle that makes life 'tragic life.' Take it away and we are engaged in 'a May game,' or

[1] 'The Last Contention' apparently is directed against 'Four Score' mating. But, using that as a second metaphor, it may also be taken to deprecate any intrusion of Age into the province of youth. One should marry before forty, but also one should write one's love lyrics and fight one's Jenas then.

as Meredith ironically has it in his 'Whimper of Sympathy'—

> 'Hawk or shrike has done this deed
> Of downy feathers: rueful sight!
> Sweet sentimentalist, invite
> Your bosom's Power to intercede.
> . . . . .
> O it were pleasant, with you
> To fly from this tussle of foes,
> The shambles, the charnel, the wrinkle!
> To dwell in yon dribble of dew
> On the cheek of your sovereign rose,
> And live the young life of a twinkle.'

And this struggle goes by rule; the stronger, the more social, or the better trained wins. A pack of wolves pulls down the deer, just as a hunt company wears down the fox:—

> 'Wild, my poor friend, has the fate to be chased;
> Civil will conquer: were't other 'twere worse.'

This is sound gospel; but the irony is rather bitter, as if coming from a man who had once found its pure milk sour in the mouth. A poet does not become an anti-sentimentalist without having had, to start with, some flush of sentiment, and 'The Doe' explains how, thirty years later, 'Young Reynard' came to be written. Emerson writes neither.

Something of this provoked irony creeps out, at times, in Meredith's later verse. There is a trace of iron which we do not find in the poet of 'May Day.' He likes to choose a sentimental subject and to be unsentimental.

One of the most sentimental subjects is the way of transition, and Longfellow, the poet of sentiment, loves to tell us how in human life there is the lament for loss.

The grass returns every spring, but our loved ones or our youth are gone with 'the grass of yester-year.' Children form a subject that affords an opening, for they do not remain children. There comes a time when the house that was once bright with their voices is vacant of their laughter :—

'The old house by the lindens
Stood silent in the shade,
And on the gravelled pathway
The light and shadow played.

I saw the nursery windows
Wide open to the air ;
But the faces of the children,
They were no longer there.

The large Newfoundland house-dog
Was standing by the door ;
He looked for his little playmates,
Who would return no more.

They walked not under the lindens
They played not in the hall ;
But shadow, and silence, and sadness,
Were hanging over all.

The birds sang in the branches,
With sweet, familiar tone ;
But the voices of the children
Will be heard in dreams alone !

And the boy that walked beside me,
He could not understand
Why closer in mine, ah ! closer,
I pressed his warm, soft hand !'

It is amusing to contrast with this Meredith's 'Change in Recurrence.' We are not bound to suppose that the girl he loved has died ; it is sufficient that time passes and that she has become the mate of another, or merely that she has grown up and gone elsewhere.

There are many reasons why 'le beau temps ne reviendra,' but I think it is natural to suppose that Meredith implies the gravest reason :—

'I stood at the gate of the cot
Where my darling, with side-glance demure,
Would spy, on her trim garden-plot,
The busy wild things chase and lure.
For these with their ways were her feast
They had surety no enemy lurked.
Their deftest of tricks to their least,
She gathered in watch as she worked.

When berries were red on her ash,
The blackbird would rifle them rough,
Till the ground underneath looked a gash,
And her rogue grew the round of a chough.
The squirrel cocked ear o'er his hoop,
Up the spruce, quick as eye, trailing brush.
She knew any tit of the troop
All as well as the snail-tapping thrush.

I gazed : 'twas the scene of the frame,
With the face, the dear life for me, fled.
No window a lute to my name,
No watcher there plying the thread.
But the blackbird hung pecking at will ;
The squirrel from cone hopped to cone ;
The thrush had a snail in his bill,
And tap-tapped the shell hard on a stone.'

In Longfellow's poem, so much insistence is laid on the instability of human affairs that we hardly notice the permanence of nature. It is introduced as an aggravation of the pathos :—

'How can ye chant ye little birds,
And I sae weary, fu' o' care,'

but that is all. In Meredith so much stress is laid on the continuance of the process that the human sorrow is forgotten. There seems a little more than human willingness to be contented 'if birth proceeds, if things

subsist.' It is a very beautiful and surprising poem, this painting of the absence of feeling which lingers on the mind almost like a sentiment,—the sentiment of no sentiment,—but it is not quite a natural poem: the thrush tap-taps his snail needlessly hard. Meredith is a little too anxious not to be Longfellow. We suspect, therefore, that at the back of him, there to be slain by the future irony, there was a little sentiment.

This sense of strain, this slight sense of opposition to something else once half entertained, appears even in his exposition of his Philosophy of Earth. It is a little harder for him to be a poet of pure Nature than it was for Emerson. There is less of Emerson's spontaneous though episodical emotion, and more of a system. Occasionally, no doubt, there is an echo of Emerson's clarity, as when speaking of the lark he says :—

> 'And every face to watch him raised,
> Puts on the light of children praised':

perhaps also—

> 'The song seraphically free
> Of taint of personality.'[1]

But almost invariably there is a curiosity of expression

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[1] In 'The Woods of Westermain' there are four or five Emersonian crystallisations :—

> 'You of any well that springs
> May unfold the heaven of things';

and

> 'Even as dewlight off the rose
> In the mind a jewel sows';

and

> 'You must love the light so well
> That no darkness will seem fell';

and

> 'Change is on the wing to bud
> Rose in brain from rose in blood.

or a compression of thought beyond Emerson's: he has an insistence, too, that is different from Emerson's iteration. It is partly on account of this thoroughness that he has caught the ear of the modern world.

Meredith's philosophy of Earth is, in short, a counsel to man to ascertain and reverence the laws of his certain home. The first demand is trust. Earth is no Mother, but dead matter, and ironical, to those who spend their lives beating on a fast-shut door. Her flowers and her meaning are for confidence:—

'Well knows she the cry of unfaith.
If we strain to the farther shore,
We are catching at comfort near.
Assurances, symbols, saws,
Revelations in Legends, light
To eyes rolling darkness, these
Desired of the flesh in affright,
For the which it will swear to adore,
She yields not for prayers at her knees;
The woolly beast bleating will shear.'

Not by clamouring to know of their personal destiny will men help themselves, but by living the life of the spirit for its own satisfying sake. So in the poem:—

'Earth whispers: "they scarce have the thirst,
Except to unriddle a rune;
And I spin none; only show,
Would humanity soar from its worst,
Winged above darkness and dole,
How flesh unto spirit must grow.
Spirit raves not for a goal."'[1]

[1] 'We must pick no locks,' says Emerson, in 'The Over Soul.' 'We must check this low curiosity':—low, because it meanly concerns ourselves.

The whole of 'A Faith on Trial' is reminiscent of Emerson, both of his Essays and Poems. We have even 'The Great Over-Reason' and the reappearance of the Titmouse as a wild cherry tree in blossom. The better and more modern a thinker is, the more he is indebted to Emerson.

We must address ourselves to our surrounding of Earth like the rest of her children—plants and trees, who accept the necessary conditions without anxiety :—

> 'They question not, nor ask
> The silent to give sound,
> The hidden to unmask,
> The distant to draw near.'

And if we confine our attention to Earth, we shall find we can learn much from her who knows not hope or fear, and who is perpetually selecting the fit and rejecting the foul. Nor is it hard for us to do this, to become pupils of Earth, for, however careless of our existence the Great Mother may be, there is in fact a sympathètic emotion aroused in us by the unplumbed world around. Even the distant stars are expressions of the same energy by which we live :—

> 'We, specks of dust upon a mound of mould,
> We, who reflect those rays, though low our place,
> To them are lastingly allied.
> So may we read, and little find them cold.'

No doubt, Earth may not intend to teach anything. What we receive may be only what we give, but we receive it back with a new emphasis. At any rate, a great part of our lives is occupied with the recognition of the processes of the universe, of its laws. We can learn from them, and we can listen to what, through them, Earth teaches. But what does she teach? She teaches a truce to tears, and a short and swift way with sheep. She teaches conflict, she teaches fitness, she teaches beauty and health :—

> 'The bird of felicity loud,
> Spun high, and a South wind blew.'

The first and chief lesson, then, is the lesson of

acceptance, of conformity to environment. We must accept struggle as well as balm, the law of pureness, Earth's healthful lusts.

The doctrine of sacrifice is attractive, and rightly attractive, to the world, because of its warfare with the chief worldly diseases, love of self and self-pity. But the gospel Meredith preaches is not a gospel of sacrifice, for, though

'To sacrifice Earth prompts her best,'

the chief law of life is that we should fulfil the laws of Earth :—

'Slain
Is no force in Westermain.'

'Put his fangs to uses,' says Meredith of the self-dragon that haunts the human wood.

Nor is this gospel as easy as at first it looks. To accept all the laws of Earth is not easy. We are to accept the laws both of human instinct and of Nature, to accept them without repining, even the law of Change without repining.

'Change and decay in all around I see,'

sings the hymn-writer tenderly and repiningly.

'Rosiest rosy wanes to crone,'

says Meredith with an absurd and happy irony, for the law of change is no tearful but a joyful law to him. His own name for it is the 'fire of renewal.' This burning is what Earth is doing; it is her life, the activity which justifies her being. There is no such thing as an end or stop in Earth's processes. The

leaf falls from the tree and makes the soil for the next year; the buried tree turns to coal, the thrush

> 'He sings me, out of Winter's throat,
> The young time with the life ahead.'

And this rushing metamorphosis which Emerson celebrated is evidenced not merely by everything in external nature. Primitive man, the one of us nearest to Earth, and primitive beliefs, are equally emphatic for unendingness. Primitive man never dreams even of his own death as an end.[1] Meredith does not mean by this to assure us that when we die we shall enter the happy hunting grounds. He means merely that in speaking of death as we do we deceive ourselves with words.[2] Literally speaking there is no such thing as death. What we call death is merely part of a process, part of the life-process. Something in the plan of Earth happens when we die, just as something happens in the plan of Earth when a leaf dies. Death is part of a process which has a meaning, and this meaning, though we can only imperfectly decipher it, quite evidently exists: it exists independently of the effect upon ourselves of that part of the process which we call our death. But our death is the change which most affects us; and it is the one change in the course of Earth's process about which we know no more than that it is a change. Yes, but it is just this mystery surrounding this change which, taken together with suffering, makes the life of man the full drama it is;

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[1] See quotation on page 214.

[2] 'Death is the word of a bovine day' says Meredith in his quaint manner, retorting upon the text.

a tragedy with a meaning in the process of things, but a meaning which from us Earth hides.[1]

Of this process, then, our lives are a portion. And consequently a life lived congruently with Earth will be a life not lived with a view to the end of a part of the process, but in sympathy with a quick whole which never ceases quickening, and which, even in what we call death, lives :—

> 'Earth knows no desolation.
> She smells regeneration
> In the moist breath of decay.'

The law to which we have to assimilate ourselves is the law of growth.

> 'For, what is human grief?
> And what do men desire?
> Teach me to feel myself the tree,
> And not the withered leaf.
> Fixed am I and await the dark to-be.'

Thus does Meredith, proclaiming, in the fine phrase of Professor Elton, a hard-won 'faith in the known life of man,'[2] counsel us to attend to what we know, to find our comfort here, and not to seek for it in desire.

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[1] 'The knowledge that we traverse the whole scale of being,' says Emerson, in a sentence after Meredith's heart, 'from the centre to the poles of nature, and have some stake in every possibility, lends that sublime lustre to death, which philosophy and religion have too outwardly and literally striven to express.'—*Essays*, 2nd series, 'Nature.'

[2] *Modern Studies*, 'Tennyson: a Lecture.' Professor Elton has been speaking especially of Tennyson's social attitude. His actual words are: 'The literature of hope, of faith in the known life of man, and of a hard-won optimism, has veteran and trained commanders beside whom Tennyson is only like an amateur aristocrat.

A large confidence that, in a different sense from Browning's, 'all 's right with the world,' replaces individual longing. Earth in those processes of hers, in those parts of her process which we can and do observe, does not disappoint us. Out of the dead day she builds her sun-set, and out of a seed and a few decayed leaves, the infinite convolution of the rose.[1]

What makes the substance of this teaching different from the substance of Emerson's? There are several points of similarity, but its whole atmosphere is harder; it relies more exclusively upon the known fact; it is much less occupied with questions as to the ultimate nature of Reality, and there is a deeper insistence on the meaning of the process, taken separate from man. In the recognition of this there is even an insistent joy. Emerson reads the whole Universe in terms of the Soul; Meredith reads it in terms of Earth. And though you may say these are merely different names for the

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permitted to accompany outlying portions of a campaign. Scarred and gaunt, sometimes harsh of style, a little overwhelming to the men of intellectual diplomacy and compromise, unscared, strong-headed, they stand, with most of their work ready for judgement, reaping a few long-grudged honours for which they cannot care. It would take long to draw out the lines of connexion between minds so divergent as those which created the poem of *Brand*, the epic story of *La Débâcle*, and *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*.'

[1] The metaphor of the rose is a favourite one with Meredith. He uses it, both to express his trust in Earth—

> 'Into the breast that gives the rose,
> Shall I with shuddering fall?'

and to justify suffering—

> 'Sure reward
> We have whom knowledge crowns;
> Who see in mould the rose unfold,
> The soul through blood and tears.'

same thing, there is a great difference in different names. To rename the All is to see it under a new aspect. Meredith subjects man to the laws of things, whereas Emerson subjects the laws of things to the Universal Soul which speaks in man. Meredith's doctrine of conformity to environment is eminently sensible, and his gospel of trust in the Process the most basically helpful that has been promulgated. These doctrines of Nature are very natural, and taken together form a Reading of Earth which is sound. Yet to read Emerson is to feel that Meredith's doctrine is a First Reading of Earth. It is a doctrine to which Emerson's doctrine gives wings. He ought to have written before Emerson instead of after him.

The difference is that one is a philosophical, the other a religious teacher, and this explains how Emerson can transmute his teaching, on occasion, into poetry of a wonderful clarity, while Meredith to poeticalise his matter has to work much harder. When Meredith has a thought we may call religious rather than philosophical, a thought of morality touched with emotion, he also is successful. There is his pronouncement on the doctrine of sacrifice given in 'The Garden of Epicurus':—

> 'That Garden of sedate Philosophy
> Once flourished, fenced from passion and mishap,
> A shining spot upon a shaggy map;
> Where mind and body, in fair junction free,
> Luted their joyful concord; like the tree
> From root to flowering twigs a flowing sap.
> Clear Wisdom found in tended Nature's lap,
> Of gentlemen the happy nursery.
> That Garden would on light supremest verge,
> Were the long drawing of an equal breath

Healthful for Wisdom's head, her heart, her aims.
Our world which for its Babels wants a scourge,
And for its wilds a husbandman, acclaims
The crucifix that came of Nazareth.'

That is hard. How different from Arnold's sonnet 'East London' which approaches the same topic from a different point of feeling. But if it has the hardness, it has the truth, of steel.

Why it is especially difficult for Meredith to poeticalise his matter is that it is in general strictly philosophical, exclusively mental, and practically bare of emotion, strictly so-called.

This, no doubt, is the primary difficulty of the intellectual poet, that he has to emotionalise his material; that he has to feel intellectual matter emotionally. But in his Philosophy of Earth Meredith experiences this difficulty in an intensified form. The ratiocination is absolutely continuous. It is a long process to which the attention of the mind has to be exclusively given. Often all that Meredith can do is to translate. There are thus two language processes. To give an example of poetry where there is only one language process, every one is familiar with the striking passage which opens *Henry IV.*, Part II. Northumberland, receiving the news of defeat and full of foreboding for the future, imagines and defies the worst:—

'Now bind my brows with iron; and approach
The ragged'st hour that time and spite dare bring,
To frown upon the enrag'd Northumberland!
Let heaven kiss earth! Now let not nature's hand
Keep the wild flood confin'd! let order die!
And let this world no longer be a stage,
To feed contention in a lingering act;

> But let one spirit of the first-born Cain
> Reign in all bosoms, that, each heart being set
> On bloody courses, the rude scene may end,
> And darkness be the burier of the dead !'

When Shakespeare says this he has made clear to himself his sense of gathering gloom ; that is to say, Shakespeare's feelings and thoughts, as a general habit, take definite form *as* they are voiced. He did not know what he was going to say till he said it. There is one language process. Poetry is Shakespeare's language, and his thought is expressed in it. Till he so expressed it, his thought was inchoate ; it was waiting to take form till it was expressed, expressed in that way.[1]

But Meredith knows exactly, before he has said it in verse, what he wants to say. Indeed the conception is clearer, because more immediate, before it is expressed in verse. It has been thought out in words beforehand, not necessarily in words written down, but a long course of abstract thinking cannot be pursued without their aid. There are two language processes. The thing does not take form in verse ; it takes intellectual form, before it is expressed in verse. What happens is that intellectual matter, on which the operations of the intellect are concluded, is written over in a state of enthusiasm, an enthusiasm that if never simulated, is often stimulated, forced. You can hear the whirr of the machine. As a result we do not get precisely poetry.

On occasion he brings it off to a miracle. He is

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[1] For some of this phraseology I am conscious of a debt to Mr. Bradley's *Poetry for Poetry's Sake.*

speaking of 'Youth in Memory,' and how in memory the facts of young life wane dim; while feelings, impressions, intuitions, shafts of day-dreams we thought nothing of at the time, now, in retrospect, seem to have been the most keenly lived:—

> 'Solidity and bulk and martial brass,
> Once tyrants of the senses, faintly score
> A mark on pebbled sand or fluid slime,
> While present in the spirit, vital there,
> Are things that seemed the phantoms of their time;
> Eternal as the recurrent cloud, as air
> Imperative, refreshful as dawn-dew.'

The whole 'Ode to the Spirit of Earth in Autumn' is thus successful. But generally this is not how it is brought off. Nor is his success brought off by his power of imperishable phrase, which is chiefly confined to his poems touching on sex. I do not mean that his command over phraseology is, in these poems of Earth, not brought into frequent use. Sometimes, very rarely, there is an emotional phrase:—

> 'Look now where Colour, the soul's bridegroom, makes
> The house of heaven splendid for the bride';

or—

> 'I stood to the touch of a key
> Turned in a fast-shut door.'

More often it is a huddled image that strikes and enchains the fancy, of which the prettiest instance is the phrase that describes the children's spatter, when their immediate business, buying pennies, school, dinner, is finished or about to begin. Off,

> 'chatter, hop, skip, they were sent,
> In a buzz of young company glee.'

And the wildest is that which describes the awe that

damps the spirit as one is staring at the star-strewn sky :—

> 'Fronting yon shoreless, sown with fiery sails,
> It is our ravenous that quails.'[1]

Yet allowing for all this, we have not explained the effect of the level of the poems, a level of which there is a great deal, and to which their general poetical effect is plainly due.

What we may, for want of a better word, call their quality of poeticalness is chiefly due to two habits, both of which are in constant employment.

The first is the high strenuousness of the argument. The packed thought, the compressed language, the way in which Meredith beats and thumps on our attention, heat the brain. It is intensity that makes 'A Faith on Trial' affect us like poetry ; it is done on tiptoe and so affects us like flight. The aloof comment of 'Earth and Man' holds the spiritual imagination with a chain. That series of cold pronouncements upon man's destiny, like minute-guns announcing the funeral of his egoism, and varied only by the insistent gibe, is truly a voice of the upper air. This strain upon our attention we can realise perhaps more easily in a descriptive piece such as 'The Lark Ascending,' a feat which stupefies our faculty of astonishment. We wonder when the particularising intellect will cease describing, miss the target, or break the string. To read it to oneself is to lose one's breath. Such intensity alone could save five hundred lines like 'The Woods of Westermain,'

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[1] These two instances are quoted together as instances of noun-adjectives and adjective nouns by Mr. Trevelyan.

a long description and a long allegory combined, neither of which for an instant is forgotten in the other, and where the Ethic is as pungent as the smell of the wood. So one man can play two games of chess at once, and another hold an audience, which is not really soaring with him, and often when he is not really soaring at all, by his arresting eye. No other poet has ever displayed the same power of concentrated interest:—

'White of heat, awakes to flame.
Beat, beat! white of heat.'

The other habit, which is of general service to the poetical effect, is his habit of obscurity, his habit of leaving a thought merely suggested, or of pitching so many thoughts into a sentence that the reader is merely conscious that many are there. It is never nonsense. You can decipher the meaning. It is really amazing how, in the hands of a fit expositor, the tangle of thought and image unrolls till you are presented with all the ideas taken separate and to be seen. But to decipher the poems is not to explain their effect; the effect is made before they are deciphered; in fact the same effect continues to be made after the deciphering. The keys to the ciphers are now known, but who can read slowly enough to apply them?

There is, of course, always an apparent or general meaning—I do not say in every line—but there is also always a consciousness that something in the verses is being missed. One has not time nor attentive faculty to absorb their full content. The result is that one seems to float in an atmosphere of surrounding

idea. The imagination of the reader is set up, like a cocked ear; it begins to hear voices, itself it becomes active and begins to flow. It is a kind of writing to which Coleridge's note-book saying that 'poetry gives most pleasure when only generally and not perfectly understood' is peculiarly applicable.[1]

Moreover, the subjects with which Meredith deals in those philosophical poems suffer better than others a treatment of this kind. Earth's processes we may observe, but we are all conscious that, despite our keenest observation or most dogmatic definition, there is a secret behind. Man perishes as the grass of the field. Let it be so. Nothing could be plainer, and now we understand all about death; and yet it is mysterious that it should be so. Love, memory, comprehension, if these are the play of chemic forces, there is an oddness remaining over. Man's soul is infinite and a part of the Infinite Soul. We are not a whit nearer plain English, and the Sphinx has spoken. Meredith's poems dealing with the problems of Universal destiny offer a similar difficulty of comprehension. The Delphic priestess is oracular; and so this poet, by his half expression or tangled expression, suggests what cannot be fully expressed, but, on the contrary, can be realised in some ways better when suggested than when over-laid with the statements of precision. He produces a matter which is really like that tangle of Universal conflicting, compensating, and even sympathetic laws of which, at best, as a whole, we have

[1] Emerson has the sense of this. 'An imaginative book renders us much more service at first, by stimulating us through its tropes, than afterward, when we arrive at the precise sense of the author.'—*Essays*, 2nd series, 'The Poet.'

an imperfect cognition. In these poems we live in a world of ideas, which cross and recross, in an oppression of ideas, in the same oppression which we ourselves inhabit when we attempt to realise Earth.

Meredith's matter in these poems, great as is his poetical faculty, is often quite beyond it. Often he does not resolve this matter into poetry. Often he trips over his thought, gets through sometimes by a series of tumbles, sometimes altogether fails to get out his idea. But this very struggle to express, the side-shafts of parenthesis, the quick-flying labouring brain, this difficulty in resolution, suggest the atmosphere of the ideas he is trying to resolve. It is very certain, despite all that the pedants of perspicuousness may say, that we ourselves are conscious at the back of our minds of a profundity, of a sense that, try as we like, we know more than we can tell.

> 'Was never voice of ours could say
> Our inmost in the sweetest way.'

This we may take for granted; but it is idle to withhold the title of poetry from work which to a rare degree yields the sense of its subject, and indicates our depth. That it does so, largely owing to its imperfection, is to say, of course, that it is not the greatest poetry, but it is not to say it is not poetry. That is poetry which yields a poetical effect.

EMERSON'S DOCTRINE OF THE INFINITE

THE course of Emerson's thought is an orderly process. While still young, and living in the old manse in which Hawthorne in after years wrote his lingering tales, he wrote the Treatise on Nature, fifty pages which explain nearly all that is explicable about the correspondence between man and his environment.

He opens the little tract by sketching roughly 'that wonderful congruity which exists between man and the world.'

'Standing on the bare ground—my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space,—all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me. . . . In the wilderness, I find something more dear and connate than in streets or villages. . . . The greatest delight which the fields and woods minister, is the suggestion of an occult relation between man and the vegetable. I am not alone and unacknowledged. They nod to me, and I to them. The waving of the boughs in the storm, is new to me and old. It takes me by surprise, and yet is not unknown. . . . Yet it is certain that the power to produce this delight does not reside in nature, but in man, or in a harmony of both.'

Thereafter he discusses the detail of this harmony under the heads of Commodity, Beauty, Language, Discipline.

Of Commodity he has necessarily little to say. On 'the rich conveniences' Earth affords to man it would be easy for an empty writer to expand. A full one is short on the obvious. Man is able to make use of everything in Nature, of beasts, fire, water, stones, and corn.

It is more difficult to speak of Beauty, but there is the fact that 'the simple perception of natural forms is a delight,' and that to us 'every natural action is graceful'; not only so; 'every heroic act is also decent, and causes the place and the bystanders to shine.' 'In private places, among sordid objects, an act of truth or heroism seems at once to draw to itself the sky as its temple, the sun as its cradle. Nature stretches out her arms to embrace man, only let his thoughts be of equal greatness.' Beauty in Nature speaks to Beauty in him.

'No reason can be asked or given why the soul seeks beauty,' but Nature both ministers to man's ardency to realise it and feeds that flame. All Art is founded upon Nature;—'the beauty of nature re-forms itself in the mind, and not for barren contemplation, but for new creation.' Art is often spoken of in contrast with Nature, but the difference is one of addition, not of opposition.

The purpose of the chapter on Language is to show that Nature is also the vehicle of man's thought: for not only are words 'signs of natural facts,' but 'every natural fact is a symbol of some spiritual fact. Every appearance in nature corresponds to some state of the mind, and that state of the mind can only be described by presenting that natural appearance as its picture.' 'It is easily seen that there is nothing lucky or capri-

cious in these analogies, but that they are constant and pervade nature.' 'Hence good writing and brilliant discourse are perpetual allegories. This imagery is spontaneous. It is the blending of experience with the present action of the mind. It is proper creation. It is the working of the Original Cause through the instruments he has already made.'

To speak in the same way of Discipline, 'Nature is a discipline of the understanding in intellectual truths. Our dealing with sensible objects is a constant exercise in the necessary lessons of difference, of likeness, of order, of being and seeming, of progressive arrangement; of ascent from particular to general; of combination to one end of manifold forces'; but not only so; 'Sensible objects conform to the premonitions of Reason and reflect the conscience. All things are moral; and in their boundless changes have an unceasing reference to spiritual nature.' . . . 'Thus the use of commodity, regarded by itself, is mean and squalid. But it is to the mind an education in the doctrine of Use, namely, that a thing is good only so far as it serves.' 'All things with which we deal, preach to us.' 'What is a farm but a mute gospel? . . . the chaff and the wheat, weeds and plants, blight, rain, insects, sun.' Every natural fact is a symbol of some moral fact, and can be read by a moral understanding.

'In this brave lodging wherein man is harboured, all his faculties find appropriate and endless exercise.' Indeed Nature's song strikes so directly on our ear, is so much our song, that a doubt is suggested whether Nature has any other object than this reference to us, or even whether the whole is not a dream of the percipient. Certain it is that Nature as read by us is

dependent upon our reading. The report of the senses depends upon the state of the senses. Change the point of view and the scene is changed. All that is observed undergoes a transmutation in human thought, in the unfixing and refixing processes of poetry, and in the pervading and dissolving thought of the philosopher.[1] 'Intellectual science has been observed to beget invariably a doubt of the existence of matter.' 'Whilst we behold unveiled the nature of Justice and Truth, we learn the difference between the absolute and the conditional or relative. We apprehend the absolute. As it were, for the first time, *we exist.* We become immortal, for we learn that time and space are relations of matter; that, with a perception of truth, or a virtuous will, they have no affinity.' . . . 'It appears' then 'that motion, poetry, physical and intellectual science, and religion, all tend to affect our convictions of the reality of the external world.'

There is then nothing outside the individual? By no means: that is an absolute idealism which is not Emerson's. We may regard nature 'as phenomena not as substance,' and yet 'acquiesce entirely in the permanence of natural laws,' in the existence of other percipient minds, in the reality of an Existence behind phenomena and supporting them. 'Behind nature, throughout nature, spirit is present; one and not compound, it does not act upon us from without, that is, in space and

[1] 'Is not the charm of one of Plato's or Aristotle's definitions, strictly like that of the *Antigone* of Sophocles? It is, in both cases, that a spiritual life has been imparted to nature; that the solid seeming block of matter has been pervaded and dissolved by a thought; that this feeble human being has penetrated the vast masses of nature with an informing soul, and recognised itself in their harmony, that is, seized their law.'—*Treatise on Nature.* 'Idealism.'

time, but spiritually, or through ourselves; therefore, that spirit, that is, the Supreme Being, does not build up nature around us, but puts it forth through us, as the life of the tree puts forth new branches and leaves through the pores of the old.'

It will be seen that Emerson, by a process of detail and founding on observation, reaches and answers in the way of Philosophical Idealism the basic question of metaphysics. By what means does the Ego obtain a knowledge of the Non-Ego? Obviously and easily, replies Idealism, if Ego and Non-Ego are of similar and correspondent nature. Obviously and easily, replies Dualism, accepting both spirit and matter, if it is so ordained. But this is to invent a 'Deus ex machina' to invent a bridge.[1] A valid Theism arrives at the conception of Deity, a Mind intelligible to mind, through finding in the Non-Ego a nature similar to the Ego. It does not presuppose the existence, much less the operations of this Mind. There is no question, if the answer is supplied.

Emerson was in no danger of surrendering his whole philosophy, a considering which makes for results, to conclusions ready made. 'Build your own world,' he says decisively. 'As fast as you conform your life to the pure idea in your mind, that will unfold its great proportions. A correspondent revolution in things will attend the influx of the spirit.'

This correspondent revolution is seen throughout the

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[1] Materialism too is a theory of the Universe that is free from the weakness of Dualism. Its root defect is different, namely that it confounds Appearance and Reality. 'Idealism,' says Emerson in his terse way, 'is a hypothesis to account for nature by other principles than those of carpentry and chemistry.'

whole course of Emerson's thought. Man understands the Universe because he is of nature akin to it. But the Universe is infinite. The Universe is understood by man because it is of similar nature to himself. But man is a being capable of thinking beyond the finite. The argument beats in with equal force from both sides. The Universe is infinite because man is not finite. Man is not finite because the Universe is infinite. There at once appear the doctrines of an embracing Infinity and of the infinity of the private man.

The All is the Universal Soul, the life of which is spread abroad not only as a Unity, but separately and divisibly in its particular parts. The Whole embraces the one, and the one reflects the Whole.

Every quality of the Universal, therefore, belongs of nature to the particular, and though, of course, on account of the tiny scale, never seen perfect there, capable in a less or lesser degree of Universality. Thus, if we conceive of the Universal as a vast circle, the most perfect unit will be so much of the circumference as exhibits roundness; an imperfect part will be one so small that it appears straight; a mere point without extension will represent Peter Bell.

Emerson's doctrine contains both a definition and an Ethic. Man is infinite; that is the fact of his being. He is a portion of the infinite imprisoned in the finite, but it is his duty to spread his wings: he ought to think infinitely. This doctrine gives, not to every man, but to the capacity of man, the infinity of the Infinite Nature.

Thus, to take Emerson's hardest saying: 'The moment the doctrine of immortality is separately taught, man is already fallen.' Our anxiety to know about our future is an anxiety that is truly finite, a

curiosity that is 'low.' Each individual soul is a part of the Universal Soul, and its true life is in the attributes of the Universal Soul; truth, justice, love, with which 'the idea of immutableness is essentially associated.' 'In the flowing of love, in the adoration of humility, there is no question of continuance. No inspired man ever asks this question, or condescends to these evidences. For the soul is true to itself, and the man in whom it is shed abroad cannot wander from the present, which is infinite, to a future which would be finite.' By finite Emerson does not mean, here, limited by definition, though he may also be thinking of that; he means limited by being confined to the particular. The individual ceases living in the life of the Whole and becomes concerned for his own duration. He has made 'a confession of sin.'

Similarly in all departments of thought, Religion, Ethics, Art, Scholarship, even Manners, we must think Universally; we must do so because in part we cannot help doing so, and in part because we ought to do so.

Appropriately Emerson opens his 'Address to the Senior Class in Divinity College, Cambridge,' with a reference to the Universe. 'In this refulgent summer, it has been a luxury to draw the breath of life. The grass grows, the buds burst, the meadow is spotted with fire and gold in the tint of flowers,' and speaking, three years later, of the 'Method of Nature,' he asks, 'Who could ever analyse it? That rushing stream will not stop to be observed. We can never surprise nature in a corner; never find the end of a thread; never tell where to set the first stone. The bird hastens to lay her egg; the egg hastens to be a bird.' Of this Protean life we necessarily partake. 'You cannot bathe twice

in the same river, said Heraclitus; and I add, a man never sees the same object twice—with his own enlargement the object acquires new aspects.' The music of the spheres is the song of revolving. Loud and insistent as the gyroscopic hum, it fills the ears of the understanding. Man's soul quickens in sympathy; he is caught up and whirled forward in the Universal race. He could not stop if he would, and for him finality is 'a discredited word.' Everything is in motion, everything that lives, the Spirit that gives life, and so also our ideas of this Spirit. Man is always writing new Bibles, but 'the secret of heaven is kept from Age to Age.' No religion, on account of the nature of man, can be final, for no sooner is it expressed than the soul must begin to circle beyond it, or disprove its own essence by sinking into finitude.

To man, distressed by his incapacity to 'rest satisfied with explanations,' even explanations of what he most cherishes, this doctrine of Emerson's is a cooling stream. Man's difficulties arise not because he is sunk in material flesh; they arise because he already possesses that of which dogma chiefly seeks to prove his possession. Were man finite he would be easily satisfied with any chart of infinity. Being infinite he is satisfied with none.

This belief that we destroy what we define, and that there is always something in the defined that escapes us, and therefore always something limiting in definition, holds equally in the sphere of morals.

First, in the merely wide and common sense, on account of the necessary width of the moral experience. It is not every one who exercises freely his religious faculties; he may take refuge in indifferentism, or he

may leave, in the phrase of the world, the matter with the priest. But every one must be a moral being; he must form ideas of the permissible if they are only immoral ideas; he must be offended with some one's conduct to him, or offend some one with his conduct. He must praise and he must blame; he must be acquainted both with satisfaction and remorse. 'We side with the hero, as we read or paint, against the coward and the robber; but we have been ourselves that coward and robber, and shall be again, not in the low circumstance, but in comparison with the grandeurs possible to the soul.'[1] When, therefore, we shut off the robber from consideration and consign him to the criminal class, as who should say, 'This is a wolf,' we are conscious of a meanness, as if we had left something unsaid. And this width of experience gives a universality of moral outlook, though not of moral judgment, even to the lowest intelligence. If the crime is not against himself, there is no mind so limited as to be without understanding of the freedom taken with the law. 'We permit all things to ourselves, and that which we call sin in others, is experiment for us. It is an instance of our faith in ourselves, that men never speak of crime as lightly as they think; or, every man thinks a latitude safe for himself, which is nowise to be indulged to another.[2] The act looks very differ-

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[1] 'Spiritual Laws,' *Essays*, 1st series.

[2] Was it some perception of this that induced folk-lore to find its fond pleasure in making the bad heroine appoint her own punishment? What should be done to a stepmother who has sold her stepchild to a witch? And the stepmother answers with unfailing moral assurance: 'She should be put into a cask studded with nails, and rolled into the sea.'

ently on the inside, and on the outside; in its quality, and in its consequences. . . . Especially the crimes that spring from love, seem right and fair from the actor's point of view, but, when acted, are found destructive of society. No man at last believes that he can be lost, nor that the crime in him is as black as in the felon. Because the intellect qualifies in our own case the moral judgments.'[1]

But there is a higher doctrine, the doctrine, not of the width of moral outlook, but of the infinity of moral idea. Even when we are on the sweetest ground, and speaking of virtue, we must not linger too long. 'Truth is our element of life, yet if a man fasten his attention on a single aspect of truth, and apply himself to that alone for a long time, the truth becomes distorted and not itself, but falsehood.'[2]

'This is the law of moral and of mental gain. The simple rise as by specific levity, not into a particular virtue, but into the region of all the virtues. They are in the spirit which contains them all. The soul requires purity, but purity is not it; requires justice, but justice is not that; requires beneficence, but is somewhat better; so that there is a kind of descent and accommodation felt when we leave speaking of moral nature, to urge a virtue which it enjoins.'[3] As I read this I seem to hear my own soul speaking, and that is expressed which I have always felt. We see now why books inculcating a virtue have an oppressive effect, why *The Heart of Midlothian* offends us morally. There is a flowing in the moral sentiment which

[1] 'Experience,' *Essays*, 2nd series.
[2] 'Intellect,' *Essays*, 1st series.
[3] 'The Over-Soul,' *Essays*, 1st series.

embraces all morality, and *cannot* attend to one thing at a time. 'For other things, I make poetry of them; but the moral sentiment makes poetry of me.'[1]

Emerson does not, like a school-book, follow his doctrine with instances. He sets himself no tasks. He does not ask how the Doctrine of the Infinite affects specifically Art, the Drama, Poetry, Education.[2] He has no chapters on Turner's pictures viewed from this aspect. No, but his thought has always this colour; it is the river on which he sails, and a hundred surprising sayings attest the purity and strength of the stream. Of Beauty, he has this to tell us: 'Nothing interests us which is stark or bounded, but only what streams with life, what is in act or endeavour to reach somewhat beyond. . . . Beauty is the moment of transition, as if the form were just ready to flow into other forms';[3] and of the beloved: 'His friends find in her a likeness to her mother, or her sisters, or to persons not of her blood. The lover sees no resemblance except to summer evenings and diamond mornings, to rainbows and the song of birds.'[4] In his essay on 'Manners,' what gives him most pleasure is what Hafiz said of his Persian Lilla: 'She was an elemental force,

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[1] *Representative Men*, 'Swedenborg.'

[2] But of course it does apply to Education. 'You send your boy to the schoolmaster, but 'tis the schoolboys who educate him.' —*Conduct of Life*, 'Culture.' 'I recall,' says Mr. Moncure Conway, 'the vigorous way in which Emerson, warning parents against what he quaintly called "disobedience to children" said in a lecture, "Get off that child! You are trying to make that man another you. One is enough."' And in *Representative Men*—'Uses of Great Men'—Emerson speaks of a world 'where children seem so much at the mercy of their foolish parents, and where almost all men are too social and interfering.'

[3] *Conduct of Life*, 'Beauty.'

[4] 'Love,' *Essays*, 1st series.

and astonished me by her amount of life.'[1] 'How often must we learn this lesson? Men cease to interest us when we find their limitations.'[2] 'We honour the rich, because they have externally the freedom, power, and grace which we feel to be proper to man, proper to us.'[3] It is the same when we abase ourselves to exalt ourselves by scraping before a throne. Something of this can be seen in the old servants of families, and it is the poetry of the English which makes them so free with titles of respect. 'All goes to show that the soul in man is not an organ, but animates and exercises all the organs; is not a function, like the power of memory, of calculation, of comparison, but uses these as hands and feet; is not a faculty, but a light; is not the intellect or the will, but the master of the intellect and the will; is the background of our being, in which they lie—an immensity not possessed and that cannot be possessed. From within or from behind, a light shines through us upon things, and makes us aware that we are nothing, but the light is all.' . . . 'We lie open on one side to the deeps of spiritual nature, to the attributes of God,' and 'the sovereignty of this nature whereof we speak is made known by its independency of those limitations which circumscribe us on every hand.'[4]

In a singularly beautiful passage Emerson speaks of the eternal distance: 'There is in woods and waters a certain enticement and flattery, together with a failure to yield a present satisfaction. This disappointment is

[1] 'Manners,' *Essays*, 2nd series.
[2] 'Circles,' *Essays*, 1st series.
[3] 'History,' *Essays*, 1st series.
[4] 'The Over-Soul,' *Essays*, 1st series.

felt in every landscape. I have seen the softness and beauty of the summer-clouds floating feathery overhead, enjoying, as it seemed, their height and privilege of motion, whilst yet they appeared not so much the drapery of this place and hour, as forelooking to some pavilions and gardens of festivity beyond. It is an odd jealousy: but the poet finds himself not near enough to his object. The pine-tree, the river, the bank of flowers before him, does not seem to be nature. Nature is still elsewhere. This or this is but outskirt and far-off reflection and echo of the triumph that has passed by, and is now at its glancing splendour and heyday, perchance in the neighbouring fields, or, if you stand in the field, then in the adjacent woods. The present object shall give you this sense of stillness that follows a pageant which has just gone by. What splendid distance, what recesses of ineffable pomp and loveliness in the sunset! But who can go where they are, or lay his hand or plant his foot thereon? Off they fall from the round world for ever and ever. It is the same among the men and women, as among the silent trees; always a referred existence, an absence, never a presence and satisfaction.'[1]

'A lady, with whom I was riding in the forest, said to me, that the woods seemed to her *to wait*, as if the genii who inhabit them suspended their deeds until the wayfarer has passed onward: a thought which poetry has celebrated in the dance of the fairies, which breaks off on the approach of human feet.'[2]

With this attitude it was certain that Emerson, in

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[1] 'Nature,' *Essays*, 2nd series.

[2] 'History,' *Essays*, 1st series.

speaking of Poetry, would seize upon Bacon's description ; a description that ascribes its charm to the fact that in it we find the infinite side of man's nature transcending his finite circumstances.[1]

'The power of music, the power of poetry to unfix, and, as it were, clap wings to solid nature, interprets the riddle of Orpheus.'[2]

'A boy hears a military band play on the field at night, and he has kings and queens, and famous chivalry palpably before him. He hears the echoes of a horn in a hill-country . . . which converts the mountains into an Æolian harp, and this supernatural *tiralira* restores to him the Dorian mythology, Apollo, Diana, and all divine hunters and huntresses.'[3]

Again, 'All the fictions of the Middle Age explain themselves as a masked or frolic expression of that which in grave earnest the mind of that period toiled to achieve. Magic, and all that is ascribed to it, is a deep presentiment of the powers of science. The shoes of swiftness, the sword of sharpness, the power of subduing the elements, of using the secret virtues of minerals, of understanding the voices of birds, are the obscure efforts of the mind in a right direction. The preternatural prowess of the hero, the gift of perpetual youth, and the like, are alike the endeavour of the human spirit "to bend the shows of things to the desires of the mind."[4]

'The poets are thus liberating gods. The ancient British bards had for the title of their order, "Those

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[1] See pages 4 and 5 of this volume ; 'Poetry : a Note.'
[2] 'History,' *Essays*, 1st series.
[3] 'Nature,' *Essays*, 2nd series.
[4] 'History,' *Essays*, 1st series.

who are free throughout the world." They are free, and they make free.'[1] They make free because they transfer things from the empire of fact to the country where thought is emperor.

'A strange process too, this, by which experience is converted into thought, as a mulberry leaf is converted into satin. The manufacture goes forward at all hours. The actions and events of our childhood and youth are now matters of calmest observation. They lie like fair pictures in the air. Not so with our recent actions,—with the business which we now have in hand. On this we are quite unable to speculate. Our affections as yet circulate through it. We no more feel or know it, than we feel the feet, or the hand, or the brain of our body. The new deed is yet a part of life,—remains for a time immersed in our unconscious life. In some contemplative hour, it detaches itself from the life like a ripe fruit, to become a thought of the mind. Instantly, it is raised, transfigured; the corruptible has put on incorruption. Henceforth it is an object of beauty, however base its origin and neighbourhood. Observe, too, the impossibility of ante-dating this act. In its grub state, it cannot fly, it cannot shine, it is a dull grub. But suddenly, without observation, the self-same thing unfurls beautiful wings, and is an angel of wisdom. So is there no fact, no event, in our private history, which shall not, sooner or later, lose its adhesive, inert form, and astonish us by soaring from our body into the empyrean. Cradle and infancy, school and playground, the fear of boys, and dogs, and ferules, the love of little maids and berries, and many

[1] 'The Poet,' *Essays*, 2nd series.

another fact that once filled the whole sky, are gone already ; friend and relative, profession and party, town and country, nation and world, must also soar and sing.'[1] 'The making a fact the subject of thought raises it.'[2]

All poetry therefore, in proportion as it refreshes us, is the play of the soul upon and behind circumstance, the recognition by the soul, in thought, of its own infinity. And this is really why no great poet has a system, or, if he has a system, why his greatest poetry lies outside it. It is why didactic poetry teaches us nothing, and why didacticism of any kind always tempts us to contradict. We feel outside it. 'It is remarkable,' says Emerson, 'that involuntarily we always read as superior beings,'[3] and, though this is not true of imaginative literature, it is very evidently so of all works that consist of statements. In literature that is truly imaginative, we inhabit an atmosphere, and can no more feel above it than we can feel above the air. But no statement encloses us, and we feel we are larger than the widest pronouncement of wisdom. The Song of Pippa makes us conscious of what lies outside her song, and when a poet *says* what we wish to believe we immediately become dissatisfied.

There are many reasons why an express optimism tires us, but the ultimate reason is that we will not be shut up to it. If man is a spirit there are but two entertainable hypotheses of death. To express them in words, meaningless because precise, either the one is merged in the All or continues distinct in apprehend-

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[1] 'The American Scholar,' *Miscellanies.*

[2] 'Intellect,' *Essays*, 1st series. [3] 'History,' *Essays*, 1st series.

ing. But to fix upon either as an alternative, or to define the future, to satisfy a finite curiosity, is to exchange a state of being for a groove. And in this groove we are restless. Doubts perplex us; weary of the tedium of knowledge we desire the opposite :—

> 'There remaineth a rest for the people of God :
> And I have had troubles enough, for one.'

We come back to it and are away again. We handsel our destiny until we tire, and return to confidence and a quiet mind only when we have destroyed our definitions. Thus even Browning's too frequent and too confident pronouncements, and certainly Longfellow's habit of expressing his hopes merely as statements of fact, are not soothing but irritating.

> 'There is no Death ! What seems so is transition ;
> This life of mortal breath
> Is but a suburb of the life elysian,
> Whose portal we call death.'

We know in a moment that that statement does not contain its subject. If this were all that could be said, not only our speculation but our longing could never have had reality, and death could never have possessed a sting. When a man tells us that all is plain sailing, we have no use for him. He offers to sell us sovereigns for a penny, and we won't buy them. We feel that the dignity of life, and the nobility of its aspirations demand a deeper consciousness of its meaning.

But the charm of Longfellow's poetry is to be found, not in these pronouncements, but in his sentiment! Undoubtedly.

How different is Emerson ! 'We grant that human life is mean; but how did we find out that it was

mean?'[1] Here Emerson replaces an affirmation with a question. Instead of a statement, he gives us, in which to disport ourselves, a whole region of thought. It is a saying the width of which justifies his own praise of the delights of the mind. 'Some thoughts always find us young, and keep us so. . . . In sickness, in languor, give us a strain of poetry, or a profound sentence, and we are refreshed; . . . instantly we come into a feeling of longevity.'[2]

In fact every attempt to enclose the infinite awakens disquiet. In hymns, for the purposes of definition, infinite notions are shrunk accordingly. The vivid imagery, the realisation, convince us of an inner unreality; the atmosphere and the attitude are too fixed, and Lucifer is not the only spirit who has good reasons for his dislike of holy water. The last ecstasies of the true believer, and the sceptic's holding of all thought in solution, are alike in contentedly inhabiting a vague; are similar in their acceptance of an ultimate mystery. The beauty of 'In Memoriam' is dimmed by Tennyson's anxiety to find an answer.[3] 'The tone of seeking is one, and the tone of having is another.'[4]

Browning's peculiar service to his generation, as a religious teacher, is not due to his optimistic dicta, though, unlike most optimistic dicta, his are not to be dismissed with a word. Of them it is not enough to

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[1] 'The Over-Soul,' *Essays*, 1st series. [2] *Ibid.*

[3] Is it fanciful to find Tennyson's deepest personal feeling expressed more singly and with an added calm in the later poems, in 'The Higher Pantheism' or the wonderful 'Vastness,' or even in single lines of a superhuman dignity?—

'Spirit, nearing yon dark portal at the limit of thy human state.'

[4] 'The Over-Soul,' *Essays*, 1st series.

say that they formed his moral and practical contribution to the social energy of the now living English, and meant the tonic-bracing of many lives. To say this of them is to say what is true, but it is not enough to say, because sometimes they sing. Expressed in the form of too confident statements, they are sometimes the music of aspiration, a real song of hope.[1] But his entirely peculiar religious service is not due to this song. Nor is it due to his fondness for argumentation, nor even to his episodical but extremely felicitous voicing of the subjective religion of his day, for this was done more fully and with a more unfailing sureness of touch by Tennyson. This is Tennyson's, not Browning's, religious achievement. What is wholly peculiar to Browning is his way of adjusting himself to circumstance, his habit of content in dubiety. It is a habit of mind, not a doctrine to be expressed in precise terms—where Browning is precise, it is generally to express himself with optimistic certainty—but it is the habit which finally explains his unshakeable confidence. This poet, though in many ways a more persistent speculator than Tennyson, has no quarrel with spiritual laws. Uncertainty in regard to the Ultimate, we can hear him saying, is not only a law of the world but a desirable law. There is his whole series of poems dealing with moods of the religious mind—'Cleon,' expressing the Greek idea of the worth of life now, but breaking through at the end towards Browning's own conclusions: 'The Epistle of Karshish,' a poem as distinctively Jewish in attitude as 'A Death in the Desert' is Christian, yet neither wholly dramatic, and

[1] 'Abt Vogler,' 'Rabbi Ben Ezra,' 'Pippa's Song.'

both partaking of Browning's sentiment: 'Bishop Blougram's Apology,' a plea for the worldly value of religion if religion is to be viewed from that aspect alone, a plea also for the basic religiousness of man: and the strange, vivid 'Caliban upon Setebos,' a heaping together of the thoughts that strike the mind when, contemplating a world of oddities, it amuses itself with supposing that all things rest on a basis of caprice—a series of poems written as if with the object of trying and testing the Universe from different points of view. There is also his doctrine, developed in 'Christmas Eve and Easter Day,' of the need for the continual reshaping of dogma, the doctrine, we might say, of the tentative dogma:[1] and there is his happy pronouncement in 'La Saisiaz' that if man were as certain of eternal as of present life he would, putting suicide altogether aside, go through his present life slackly and as a spectator. A belief in individual duration is Browning's central belief, as it was the belief about which Tennyson was most anxious, but accept it for a fact of existence and all the sap is out of living. We should be colonists, not home-dwellers in the world, perpetually dreaming of the voyage home. It is well 'that a veil shuts down on the facts of to-morrow,'[2] just as it is well that in life perfect happiness cannot be preserved. If it could, if one could ride with one's love for ever along the Surrey pastures in April, or on May-Day by the Creetown shore, we should 'burn

[1] Cp. Emerson, 'The Poet,' *Essays*, 2nd series. 'The history of hierarchies seems to show, that all religious error consisted in making the symbol too stark and solid.'

[2] 'The Over-Soul,' *Essays*, 1st series.

upward' to no 'point of bliss.' Again there is his questioning as to our wishes; in 'Speculative,' whether we really do wish a new life or just 'Earth's old life' restored, and in 'Old Pictures in Florence,' whether our actual longing is for Eternal Progression or Eternal Rest. The answer suggested is very simple, that we desire all, and that there is no limit to infinite desire.

Men are fond of table-rapping, of Longfellow's 'Psalm of Life,' and of developing the finite side of their natures, but in fact there is an atmosphere that is fresher than that of the séance-chamber. 'People wish to be settled; only as far as they are unsettled is there any hope for them.'[1] 'It was no Oxonian, but Hafiz, who said, "Let us be crowned with roses, let us drink wine, and break up the tiresome old roof of heaven into new forms."'[2] Our pleasure in these poems is that in them the soul gets 'soaring room,' and hovers 'with unconfinéd wings.'

Emerson's doctrine explains equally well, in regard to the moral atmosphere of books, the less obvious of our likings and dislikings. An imaginative artist becomes weak when he takes an attitude to his characters, and is no longer content to let them play outside him. There is a detraction from the fluidity of life. In Scott's novels you are, when all praise is exhausted, keeping company with a gentleman; in the Norse sagas with humanity. Especially is this limitation apparent when there is a moral attitude. An express morality is the negation of freedom, and 'Thou shalt not' is a discord to the soul. What the soul loves to contemplate is the flowing of a passion, even the

[1] 'Circles,' *Essays*, 1st series. [2] 'Literature,' *English Traits*.

passionate austerity of the saint, for all realisation is grand. A love that breaks law and scorns death, tramples upon fame and sets kingdoms at variance, is, as an anti-social disturbance, not recognised by poetry, but only when it is viewed as a thing explaining, even justifying, itself. The imagination looks on the positive side of every action, for on the negative side it is limited. The same story, which, left alone, is the milk of moral nature, turns sour in a finite churn. Morality makes immorality of so much of the morality of art. In the world there is no sweeter legend than that of the affection of Tristan and Iseult as told by Gottfried von Strassburg in Miss Weston's beautiful version; an affection so powerful that it topples over everything the world holds dear,—truth, friendship, honour. So brutally frank is the dilemma that the legend is itself afraid of it, and invents the philtre. The noble Sigurd drank of a potion before his mind turned from Brynhild to thoughts of a more earthly maid. It was magic, says the trembling mortal, just as to-day we say he must have been mad. But this lunacy happens because Love reigns; and because of that, Mortality endures and each new series in the troubled succession discovers life is good. In our hearts we know the poet is singing not of broken law, but of law fulfilled. Yet Tennyson did not know this, and he has made a story which the world knows as profitable, a tale of license and marital revenge.[1] The actual subject of Tristan and

[1] 'The Last Tournament.' Tennyson in his sketch has altered the tone of the story because, while accepting the incidents, he views them differently. It is perhaps worth saying that it was a matter of course that he should view them differently. Tennyson was speak-

Iseult was as much above Tennyson's capacity as the actual subject of Hiawatha was above Longfellow's. Both subjects, in their different ways, were grander than the two very different poets: 'The wise Dandamis, on hearing the lives of Socrates, Pythagoras, and Diogenes read, "judged them to be great men every way, excepting that they were too much subjected to the reverence of the laws, which to second and authorise, true virtue must abate very much of its original vigour."'[1]

How sweet is the nut in Shakespeare's shell! In re-telling the tale of 'the gentle lady married to the Moor,' he does not, like Cinthio, tell us that she ought

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ing from a society with a much deeper consciousness than the Middle Ages of the necessity of social law. To re-tell to-day the whole detailed story of Tristram in the way of the Middle Ages would be merely to trifle with one's own morality. That is why Swinburne's version affects us as essentially trifling, as without moral content. But the real problem is how to preserve the meaning of a legend. Morris in his 'Sigurd the Volsung' has evaded the difficulty by confining himself to translation. Morris does not really tell Sigurd's story again. What he has left us is the translation, nearest of all English translations to the meaning of his original. It was reserved for Arnold to meet the difficulty full face. Arnold in his Tristram does not exactly omit the incidents, but he views them generally, and only in retrospect, and is thus able to preserve the feeling of his original without doing violence to his own feeling. Arnold quite freely and whole-heartedly celebrates at the death-bed of Tristram what Gottfried von Strassburg had celebrated by Tristram's life;—I mean the persistence or *undefeatability* of affection. Arnold does really *re-tell* the story of Tristram (that is to say, Arnold's Tristram is full throughout not of a translated feeling but of Arnold's own feeling), and if it be urged that his beautiful re-telling forms an inadequate version of the old tale, it must be answered that some stories in their entirety cannot be told again. After all, there remains the old story. We cannot make a modern story out of the *Iliad*, but that should not prevent us from seeing what the *Iliad* means.

[1] *New England Reformers*: A Lecture, 1844.

not to have done so, but that she did, and no one reading 'Romeo and Juliet' ever dreamt that they were in the wrong.

King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid are very pleasing to the imagination which delights in seeing the requirements of place and condition violated, and always hopes to believe that there are no obstacles to the power of love. We know indeed that there *are* none and that love *can* triumph over everything. We know also, of course, that such marriages are seldom successful, and the result, generally, not a witness to the essential equality of humanity, but two broken lives. Yet when Tennyson tells us this in 'The Lord of Burleigh,' we do not thank him. These troubles, which 'the gallant gay domestics' cannot soften, seem to us falsities. It is idle to tell us that the story is much more true to life than King Cophetua, and that Tennyson is here dealing with the fact. A mere social fact which illustrates nothing, which tells us nothing but that we are creatures of circumstances, is no fact for the imagination. 'The child asks, "Mamma, why don't I like the story as well as when you told it me yesterday?" Alas, child, it is even so with the oldest cherubim of knowledge. But will it answer thy question to say, Because thou wert born to a whole, and this story is a particular?'[1]

The practical nature of their genius is what gives the English this fatal blindness; and their racial incapacity to see the infinite in the life before them explains why to-day we have so much competent fiction that is not of literary value. In speaking of 'The Sublime,' Mr.

[1] 'Experience.' *Essays*, 2nd series.

Bradley turns, for an instance from a modern writer, by natural instinct, to Turgenieff. And yet as much talent goes to the making of Thackeray's novels as to his. The difference is surely racial; for no modern writer has a deeper sense than Thackeray of an underlying illusion, a better feeling for Autumn and for Finis. But when he comes to describe, it is gone. His characters do not move in an infinite world. Often he stops speaking of them, to speak to us of the Infinite, but his characters he does not read infinitely. It is his sentiment that is his imperishable part. What things of wood, and law, and class, are these personages; how much bohemianism and gentlemanliness and young-ladyhood disguises from us the soul! A silly story by Anatole France, not to mention his achievements, brings one nearer the interior of a being.

Of the grotesques of Dickens it is necessary to speak more carefully. Clearly there are no characters, so little merely copies of individuals, which are so lacking in reference to the infinite, and Dickens when he is most Dickens, has no consciousness of a vast. Pickwick and Mantalini, Pecksniff and Mrs. Gamp, live in no world of illusion, but, on the contrary, eat substantial food. They were not born for death, as Mr. Chesterton says truly. They possess the never-dying-ness of Falstaff, that absence of being terminal or on a visit here, which attaches to all true children of Comedy, as well as to Comedy herself. For all this the range of their reference is wide. They are not part of an infinite Universe, but they throw light upon an infinite number of other characters. They are succulent, not wooden, and illustrate by their absurdities

half the follies of mankind. The kindliness of Micawber is shared by the human race, and you learn more about men from these people who never lived than by much painful study of separate lives. Hence, in speaking of Dickens in this connection, one has to pick one's words. His characters are not finite, in the sense in which that term is used of Thackeray's. Each speaks for many, and not one of his great creations is self-contained. The atmosphere of these astonishing novels is very wide. In the main you are dealing with traits, not people, and thus the reference to character is almost infinite.

And yet when this is frankly said, and one has realised the cause of the feeling of width which one gets in reading Dickens, it is obvious that no more than in Thackeray are you reading of the soul. The world is a world of Victorian *grotesque*, but it is a desperately Victorian world, and staked round with the paraphernalia of common things. The heart shown within this palisade is very soft and generous, but is never merely the heart of man. The soul is conscious neither of its immensity nor of its width, and never beats against the limits of to-day.

In contemporary non-English Art there is sometimes 'a subjugation of an opposite character.' In Mr. Synge's 'Riders to the Sea,' a little poem which makes the 'dead march' exquisite and lovely, a thing of rainbow and pearl, the finite is almost wholly forgotten. Maeterlinck began in harbour, it is true, and in 'The Princess Maleine,' it is at life's door that Death knocks ; but in his later and greater fantasies there is too much open sea. 'The Intruder' no longer *intrudes* upon what is his own domain, and existence seems a protest

increasingly unavailing against a surrounding vague. To look fixedly at the sun is not the best way to see it, and one cannot live for ever in the country of 'Les Aveugles.' 'The health of the eye seems to demand a horizon. We are never tired so long as we can see far enough.'[1] It is beautifully said, but Emerson's sanity always implicitly adds that the health of the body requires some place on which to put one's feet. The ship should swing at its moorings.

Hawthorne, by being an American, escapes at once this tendency to dispense with a basis, and the amateurism of English mid-century Art. Life exists, but man's adventures form the stuff out of which the soul is made, not the object nor the true interest of its being. Hawthorne's stories therefore begin where those of Thackeray and Dickens end. The whole business of Westervelt and Zenobia lies in the background; the interest of the Marble Faun deepens after the murder of Vision; *The House of the Seven Gables* is a tale of twilight. His characters, who one and all suggest no social place, are as familiar as faces in a dream, and, in a smaller theatre, display as freely a universal heart as the frantic owner of the horse Malek-Adel[2] or the stumbling Levin with the priest.[3]

When morality has no more to say, the moral instinct is awakened, and the tender Clifford, whose vitality has been whipped to tatters by the iron prison system, speaks to deeps in the ordinary vital man. Few things in literature are more sublime than the

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[1] *Treatise on Nature.*

[2] Tourgenieff: *A Sportsman's Sketches.*

[3] Tolstoy: *Anna Karenina*, Part V. Chapter I.

introduction of the child Pearl in *The Scarlet Letter.* Hester wears the seal of the outlaw uncomplainingly. Banished from the life of her community, she comes to see things in their essence, and where all is forgotten but human feeling, there only is at home. 'She came, not as a guest, but as a rightful inmate, into the household that was darkened by trouble. . . . There glimmered the embroidered letter, with comfort in its unearthly ray. Elsewhere the token of sin, it was the taper of the sick-chamber. It had even thrown its gleam, in the sufferer's hard extremity, across the verge of time. . . . In such emergencies, Hester's nature showed itself warm and rich; a well-spring of human tenderness, unfailing to every real demand, and inexhaustible by the largest. Her breast, with its badge of shame, was but the softer pillow for the head that needed one.'

The wound burns and heals, but for ever it burns. The child is there, by an inspiration, at once as the protest of lawlessness and as the lawful protest of Earth.

'In the afternoon of a certain summer's day, after Pearl grew big enough to run about, she amused herself with gathering handfuls of wild flowers, and flinging them, one by one, at her mother's bosom; dancing up and down, like a little elf, whenever she hit the scarlet letter. Hester's first motion had been to cover her bosom with her clasped hands. But, whether from pride or resignation, or a feeling that her penance might best be wrought out by this unutterable pain, she resisted the impulse, and sat erect, pale as death, looking sadly into little Pearl's wild eyes. Still came the battery of flowers.'

The Puritans are here on the side of a virtue essential to society; and yet we feel that in dealing with a breach of it, as the Puritans did here, with a single eye to reprobation, we have come upon something of the conventional, and that in their purely moral atmosphere the spirit of man is cramped. We feel as if a disrespect were being done to life,—or to give Emerson's words—'The soul requires purity, but purity is not it. . . . So that there is a kind of descent and accommodation felt when we leave speaking of moral nature, to urge a virtue which it enjoins.'[1] The introduction of Pearl, in short, entices the soul outside the life of man and links it with the Universal life. Of all things purity is the most lovely, and yet we can approach too singly to its celebration. 'The sea is lovely, but when we bathe in it, the beauty forsakes all the near water.'[2] So great and moral is the imagination that it is in Art man finds his freest moment and ethical delight.

A balancing criticism will, however, admit that while the moral atmosphere of Hawthorne is thus profound, it is not absolutely healthy. In part from the nature of the case. As his interest does not begin till the customary moral judgment is pronounced, to get his circumstances set to his liking, he has always to deal with broken law; and since he has no interest in moral problems in the ordinary sense, he is always tempted to emphasise this breach. The questions he asks are subsequent questions, and he is careful, instinctively, that no initial question of the right or wrong

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[1] 'The Over-Soul,' *Essays*, 1st series.

[2] 'Beauty,' *Conduct of Life.*

of the actual action should distract the attention. Besides, he inherits from his forefathers more than something of the Puritan consciousness of sin. The combined result is that he so constantly tells us his characters are sinners, and dwells so much on the enormity of their offences, that he produces an atmosphere, a little hectic, a little fevered. It is not exactly an atmosphere of lost souls, but it is an atmosphere in which we are oppressed. His morality here may be said, the morality of as pure and gentle a moralist as ever lived, to be a little defective. We miss Shakespeare's large confidence in his readers, his trust in our moral nature. Why should we be anxious to teach the human conscience what it knows for itself? Why should one wish to be more moral than the world?

It is sometimes of advantage to an imaginative artist to be less so, and there are instances of literature being saved by having no morality at all. When one remembers the more horrible tales of Poe, 'Berenice,' for instance, 'The Case of M. Waldemar,' even the incomparably skilful 'Lygeia,' one asks oneself by what legerdemain are we made to tolerate such stories, how is it they do not totally disgust.

For this reason—their whole appeal is to the curious intellect.

Indeed, when one comes to think of it, nothing is more surprising in Poe's tales than the rarity of the occasions on which the moral judgment is appealed to; the rarity of the occasions on which the moral judgment is even aroused. To adopt a phrase of his own, 'the nervous intensity of interest with which in his case the powers of observation and meditation,' and these

powers alone, 'busy and bury themselves in the contemplation' of the most extraordinary occurrences, is perhaps the greatest of all his miraculous qualities.

When Poe deals ostensibly with moral effects he is weak. The story of William Wilson is meant to be a story of conscience. In so far as it is so, it is a manufactured thing. The great success it achieves is due to the intellectual pleasure derived from surprise. 'The Man of the Crowd' has a tremendous effect, but the effect is not the effect of morality but of mystery. This is why Poe's poems are no better than they are. It is impossible to write considerable poetry unless there is a basis of moral idea. But this absence of moral idea, which is a basic defect in a poet, is the crowning merit of an artist in the horrible. We can tolerate from Poe what we can tolerate from no one else. He presents us with a detailed account of cannibalism at sea, and it does not totally sicken: a hideous murder is with him an event, and when a husband plunges with his wife's corpse overboard, we are excited—nothing more. This is what would be thought unfeeling by the Tribunal of the Terror, yet our pleasure in these stories is that in them the prying intellect can satisfy itself undisturbed.

More often, no doubt, we are not content merely to say goodbye to limitations; we override them. We side with Ajax against the lightning, and there is no rule made by man or essential to our condition the yoke of which sometimes we do not feel to gall. Nietzsche's violence lets us see the doctrine of sympathy, for once, wholly from outside, and relieves the spirit from a creeping bondage to the best. 'Honour him,' says Emerson in his highest strain, 'whose life is perpetual

victory. . . . With eyes open, he makes the choice of virtue, which outrages the virtuous ; of religion, which churches stop their discords to burn and exterminate ; for the highest virtue is always against the law.'[1] And so apparent is the fact at the base of this that sometimes we even sport with it, and imagine a tun-bellied sot and sensualist as the type of the liberated soul. 'The bliss of freedom gained in humour,'[2] says Mr. Bradley, 'is the essence of Falstaff,' and, once he has demonstrated the cause of our pleasure in this character, the cause is obvious. In great literature we discover that the mind has sides to it, and loves neither straight lines nor closed doors.

What is the method of the grand illustrator of the genus Man? By what means does Shakespeare bring home to us, in a surprisingly new way, old truths about ourselves? Are those large results achieved by the use of good sense, by telling us probable fictions or by making his imaginary characters act as they would act in life? It would be more true to say that he manages it by contradictions, impossibilities, surprises, by the negation of the probable. The fine harmonies of *The Winter's Tale* are directly due to his making men jealous for no reason, affectionate wives punish repentant husbands for sixteen years, and princesses brought up in a cottage betray no traces of their upbringing. In *Hamlet* he tells us the story of a middle-aged and accomplished prince, still at school, acting and treated like a boy, to distinguish further the complexity of the mind : in *Macbeth* a hobgoblin tale about

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[1] 'Worship,' *Conduct of Life*.

[2] *Oxford Lectures on Poetry*, 'The Rejection of Falstaff.'

a bloody tyrant, to make clear to us the humanity of man. Shakespeare's Othello is of a free and open nature, and for his revenge he can think of nothing better than to employ his servant in a mean assassination. Everything Tolstoy has said about *Lear* is true. It is a conglomeration of melodramatic absurdities, and yet there is no religion that speaks more eloquently to the suffering of the world.

But is this peculiar to Shakespeare? Is it not true of all the literature we most value that it goes a step beyond extravagance and mixes, in great plenty, smoke with flame? By indirections we find directions out and read folly to be wise. In the *Iliad*, gods and heroes are always achieving the impossible. We love Hector because he was dragged in the dust, and Achilles for sulking in his tent. The *Odyssey* is a fairy tale, and often a most foolish one. *Don Quixote* and *Gulliver's Travels* are well fitted to be favourites in the nursery. Ariosto's fable is more childish than Tasso's, and therefore can bear to be longer. What nonsense amused the German mind in the Middle Ages—Siegfried with his cap of darkness—the ring of fire—the maidens singing under water about a bag of sovereigns—a man wooing his bride for another, and in the form of that other. It is of a piece with Goethe's rigmarole about the Prince of Darkness neglecting his business to go sky-larking on the Brocken, Milton's folly about the celestial war, and apple, and Dante's subterranean fears.

Who reads these tales, if not every one? The stockbroker in the evening is found grinning over the wild adventures of Pantagruel. The lawyer on a Sunday is sealed with Merlin in the hollow oak. The

good clergyman, in the week, knows the roll of the prophets no better than the love affairs of Jupiter.

'Innocently to amuse the imagination,' said Goldsmith, 'in this dream of life is wisdom'; for indeed, it is the patent or visible that is the absolute fiction, and in dreams alone we behold the true. Towns, Cathedrals, the Bank of England, and the Pyramids, nay the very senses which return us our report of these, do we not know they are ephemera—the finite on their way to pass; and that there is nothing real at all but the spirit, which is infinite, and the cloudland of fancy in which it dwells. There we see ourselves as in a glass and not darkly, our real selves that, in life, perhaps, never got a word spoken. The old bachelor climbs rope-ladders with Romeo, the schoolmistress is enthusiastic over Desdemona's marriage, and we are all at last happy when the ruffian Posthumus, who laid a bet about his wife's honour, is dismissed to happiness and Imogen. In Shakespeare's world we find jealousy impressive and a murderer a moralist. It is an unfixed world in which we find ourselves at home. But no great literature differs in kind from his. There is 'the Zoroastrian definition of poetry, mystical, yet exact, "apparent pictures of unapparent natures."'[1] In all poetry we recognise as great, we can hear this veiled reality whispering to our hidden self, and can set out to test those contradictions which life supplies but leaves unresolved; for is not man himself a contradiction—a spirit bound to make matter serve his turn?

He kills animals by his cunning and stores with

[1] *English Traits*, 'Literature.'

careful providence his annual corn, he builds houses brick by brick; but he lives in his imagination, he flies only when he essays a daring flight, and feels human when he rests upon his wings. Man himself is the enigma. Hovering in an Eternity, on his voyage from the unknown to the unknown, he is himself, in Carlyle's language, 'the mystery of mysteries,' to be interpreted but by stray glints and gleams, interpretable, if at all, not by prose and reason but by poetry.

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